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THE KING OEDIPUS AND PHILOCTETES
OF SOPHOCLES.

©

THE
KING OEDIPUS AND PHILOCTETES

OF
SOPHOCLES

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH VERSE

BY
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✓
WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
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1875, May 10.
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TO

R. S. C.

PREFACE.

IN publishing another portion of this version of *Sophocles*, the Translator wishes to return his best thanks to those unknown friends who have noticed his former volume. He hopes ere long to complete his translation of the two remaining plays.

The translator of a poet can make little use of previous translations, though he may owe something to them of which he is not conscious. To what extent this has been the case in the present instance, the critical and candid reader must be the judge.

It is a singular and instructive fact that the translations of the *Ajax*, *Electra*, and *Oedipus Rex* by L. Theobald (1714–15) are now quite forgotten, though they were executed with considerable spirit, and that of the *Electra* had the rare fortune of being acted in London about the year 1780 (see Lee's *Dramatic Miscellany* for that year). The still earlier rhymed version of the *Electra* by C. Wase (The Hague, 1649) was a Royalist effusion, Orestes being Charles II., and Electra the Princess Elizabeth. The *Oedipus* has also been separately translated, by Maurice in last century, and by Sir Francis Doyle in this. The *Oedipus* of Dryden and Lee is in some passages a transcript from *Sophocles*. The translations of the seven plays by Francklin, Potter, Dale, and Plumptre are well known. Of the last, which is now in a third edition, it does not become the present writer to speak. It was with reference to the three former that one, who was no mean judge of such things, said, nearly half a century ago: 'Not much genius has been wasted on the translation of *Sophocles*, and yet it might have been wasted'¹—words which have an encouraging sound for one who has striven, though feebly and from a distance, to reflect faithfully the colours of his original.

¹ *New Monthly Magazine* for 1825.

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KING OEDIPUS.

THE KING OEDIPUS AND PHILOCTETES
OF SOPHOCLES.

THE ARGUMENT.

OEDIPUS was the son of Laius and Jocasta, who were King and Queen of Thebes. His birth had been forbidden, and his parents sent him to be exposed on Mount Cithæron. But the messenger took pity on the child, and gave him to a servant of Polybus the King of Corinth, who adopted him.

Years afterwards, Laius went on a mission to Delphi, and was met by Oedipus, who had just received a dreadful oracle there, and was afraid to return to Corinth. The strangers quarrelled, and Oedipus slew his father. One of the attendants of Laius escaped. It was the same man who had spared him when a child. Oedipus passed on and came to Thebes, where the news of the death of Laius found the city already in distress. The Sphinx was killing all who failed to solve her riddle. But Oedipus solved it, and delivered Thebes. He was rewarded with the vacant throne and with the hand of the queen,—his mother Jocasta.

After another interval of several years, a pestilence falls upon the city, and the oracle declares that it is for the blood of Laius. Oedipus undertakes to find the murderer, and with the help of the old servant, who is brought from his retreat, unveils the horror of his birth.

KING OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS.—PRIEST OF JUPITER.—SUPPLIANTS.

Oed. Children, young care of Cadmus' ancient fold,
Why press ye so to kneel beside the gate,
With wool-tufts on each suppliant olive-bough,
Whilst o'er your city clouds of incense rise,
And mingled voice of pæan and of wail?
Not choosing, O my sons, to know of this
By the ear from others, I myself am come,
Great Oedipus, of universal fame.
Thou, aged sir, whose look proclaims thee meet
To speak for these, say, what hath brought you here,
What terror, what desire? Fear not but I
Will use all power to succour you. My heart
Were hard to move, were it not stirred by you.

Pr. Great ruler of my country, thou behold'st
What diverse ages hem thine altar round;
Some not yet able to fly far, and some
Burdened with many years, Heaven's ministers,
I, priest of Jove,—and these, a chosen band
From our fresh youth. Another troop, arrayed,
Like us, with fillets, crowd the market-place.

Others are kneeling at the twofold shrines
Of Pallas, and Ismenus' prophet-fire :—
Because our land, as thou perceiv'st, is tossed
Exceedingly, and cannot lift her head
From fierce engulfing by a murderous sea.
Earth's buds are wasted, and the grazing herds
Pine, and our women have not strength to bear,
While fiery Pestilence, detested power,
Is fallen upon our city in his might,
Emptying the house of Cadmus, and dark Death
Hath full fruition of laments and groans.
We therefore and these children at thy hearth,
Not likening thee unto the gods, are set,
But holding thee of men pre-eminent
In human fortunes, and affairs divine ;
Who, in thy coming to this Theban town,
Didst free us from the tribute we had paid
To that harsh songstress, nought advantagèd
By aught we had to tell thee, or could teach,
But by the aid of some supernal mind
'Tis thought and said thou didst restore our life.
Now, then, O Oedipus of mighty fame,
We turn our suppliant faces unto thee,
Together praying thee to find for us
Some succour, if thou knowest, whether from man,
Or whispered to thee by some voice from Heaven.
Experienced counsel, we have seen and found,
Hath ever prosperous issue. Thou, then, come,
Noblest of mortals, give our city rest
From trouble ; come, take thought, for to this hour
All here proclaim thee for thy former zeal
Their saviour. Let us not remember thee

As having risen underneath thy sway
To fair prosperity, and after fallen :
But be thy restoration without fail.
Be now, as then, auspicious in thine aid.
'Tis better for the sovereign of a land
To rule a people than a wilderness.
For what availeth ship, or fenced wall,
Untenanted of living men within ?

Oed. Alas, my children ! Not unknown to me
Is the sad quest on which ye come. I know
Ye all are suffering. Yet not one of you
Can equal his calamity to mine.
Yours is the simple grief that visiteth
One single bosom. But my burdened soul
Mourns for myself, my citizens, and thee.
And now ye rouse me not from the soft bed
Of slumber, but full many have been my tears,
Many the paths my voyaging thought hath tried.
Yet, searching every way, one only cure
I have found, and put to proof, by sending Creon,
Menceceus' son, the brother of my queen,
To learn within Apollo's Pythian hall
What word or deed of mine may save this city.
And now as I compute the time, I am pained
To know his speed. The day for his return
Is more than come. He should be here ere now.
But when he shall arrive, base then were I
To fail in aught of all the god may show.

Pr. Even now these young ones tell me he draws near,
In happy time to crown thy gracious word.

Oed. Apollo ! may his coming be as blest
With saving fortune as his looks are bright !

Pr. Sure he comes joyfully, else had he ne'er
Worn that full garland of thick-berried bay.

Oed. We have not long to doubt. He can hear now.—
Son of Menœceus, brother of my queen,
What answer from Apollo dost thou bring?

Cr. Good: for my message is, that even our woes,
Borne right unto their issue, shall be well.

Oed. What saith the oracle? Thy words so far
Hearten me not, nor hasten me to fear.

Cr. Say, must I speak where these are standing by,
Or go within? I am ready either way.

Oed. Let it be heard by all. My heart is sore,
Not for myself, but for the souls I see.

Cr. My lips shall utter what the god hath said.
Sovereign Apollo clearly bids us drive
Forth of our country an accursed thing
(For such is fostered in this land, and stains
Our clime), and not to cherish it past cure.

Oed. By what purgation of what dire mishap?

Cr. By exile, or atoning blood with blood.
This murder is the storm that shakes our state.

Oed. Of what man doth he intimate the fall?

Cr. My gracious lord, before thy fortunate reign,
King Laius was the leader of our land.

Oed. I know him by report. I never saw him.

Cr. The god commandeth us to punish home
The undetected authors of his death.

Oed. But they, where are they? where shall now be
seen

The faded impress of this ancient guilt?

Cr. He saith, 'tis in this land. And what is sought
Is found, while things uncared for glide away.

Oed. But where did Laius meet this violence ?
At home, abroad, or in some foreign land ?

Cr. He left us, as he said, to visit Delphi ;
But nevermore returned since he set forth.

Oed. And was there none, no fellow-traveller,
To see, and tell the tale, and help our search ?

Cr. No, they were slain : save one, who fled in fear,
And only had one certain thing to tell.

Oed. What was that thing ? A little door of hope
Once opened, may discover much to view.

Cr. A random troop of robbers, so 'twas told,
Destroyed him, not with one, but many a hand.

Oed. How could the robber to such boldness rise,
Were not his crime suborned with Theban gold ?

Cr. We thought of that. But Laius being dead,
No helper found us in our miseries.

Oed. What misery, when majesty was fallen,
Could hold you back from searching to the end ?

Cr. A present trouble had engrossed our care.
The riddling Sphinx compelled us to attend
Her song, and not to think of things unseen.

Oed. But I will track this evil to the spring
And force it out to light. Full worthily
Doth great Apollo, worthily dost thou
Direct this sudden effort for the dead.
And ye shall see me justly your ally,
Aiding the cause of Phœbus and the land ;
For I, in scattering this offence, will serve
No far-off friend, but mine own self no less :
The man who murdered Laius may choose
To make me too the victim of his rage :
So then, in shielding his affairs from wrong,

I vindicate myself. Now, children, rise
 From yonder steps, and lift your suppliant boughs,
 And let some other summon hitherwards
 All Cadmus' people, and assure them, I
 Will answer every need. This day shall see us
 Blest with glad fortune through God's help, or fallen.

Pr. Rise then, my children. Even for this we came
 Which of his own accord he promiseth :
 Only may Phœbus, who hath sent this word,
 Both saving health and sure relief afford.

CHORUS (*entering*).

I. 1.

Kind voice of Heaven, soft-breathing from the
 height
 Of Pytho rich in gold to Thebè bright,
 What wilt thou bring to-day ?
 Ah, Delian Pæan, say !
 My heart hangs on thy word with trembling awe :
 What new-given law,
 Or what returning in Time's circling round
 Wilt thou unfold ? Tell us, immortal sound,
 Daughter of golden Hope, we pray, we pray !

I. 2.

First, child of Jove, Pallas, to thee appealing,
 Then to sweet Artemis, thy sister, kneeling,
 Who guardeth our fair land
 With blessing from her hand,
 Throned o'er the circling mart that hears her praise,
 And thou, whose rays

Pierce evils from afar, ho ! come and save,
Ye mighty three ! if e'er before ye drave
The threatening fires of woe from Thebè, come to-day !

II. 1.

For ah ! the griefs I bear
Are endless ; all I have is out of gear,
And not a weapon near
To fray this hated pest from hearth or hall.
Earth's blossoms blasted fall :
Nor can our women rise
From childbed after pangs and cries ;
But flocking more and more
Unto the western shore,
Soul after soul is seen to wing her flight,
Swifter than quenchless flame, to the far realm of Night.

II. 2.

So countless deaths abound.
My city's sons unpitied lie around
O'er this plague-cumbered ground.
And wives, and matrons old, on every hand,
Along the altar-strand,
Groaning in saddest grief,
Pour supplication for relief.
Loud hymns are sounding clear ;
And loud lament, as near.
Then, golden daughter of the heavenly sire,
Send fair-eyed succour to subdue this fire.

III. 1.

And swiftly speed afar,
Windborne on backward car,

This shieldless War-god with loud onset sweeping,
 To oarless Thracian tide,
 Or ocean chambers wide,
 Where Amphitritè lone her couch is keeping.
 Day ruins what night spares ; O thou whose hand
 Wields lightning, blast him with thy thundering brand.

III. 2.

Shower from the golden string
 Thine arrows, Lycian King !
 O Phœbè, let thy fiery lances fly
 Resistless, as they rove
 Through Xanthus' mountain-grove !
 O Theban Bacchus of the lustrous eye,
 With crown and torch and wavering Mænad throng
 Blaze on the god disowned the gods among.

Oed. Yea, ye shall find, according to your prayer,
 Help and relief, if ye will heed my voice,
 And answer the requirement of the plague.
 Receive the word I give you, though a stranger
 Both to the story and the deed. Not far
 Could I have traced it, having nought by me
 Pertaining to the matter. But to-day,
 A citizen, though last upon the roll,
 To all of you Cadmeians I speak this :
 Whoe'er among you knows the murderer
 Of Læius the son of Labdacus,
 I bid him show the thing in full to me.
 Himself, if he have any fear, withdrawing
 The guilt on his own head ;—he shall be vexed
 No further, but go safely from the land.

Or if another from a foreign soil
Be known by any to have done this wrong,
Let him break silence. He shall have from me
Reward and lasting gratitude beside.
But if ye keep it close, and one refuse
To utter this, as fearing for a friend
Or for himself, then hear my final word.
I now forbid that man, whos'er he be,
Throughout this land where I hold power and sway,
To be received or spoken with, or share
In vow or sacrifice or lustral rite :
But all shall drive him from their doors, for he
Is our pollution, as the Pythian shrine
Oracular hath late to me revealed.
So firm is mine alliance to the God
And your dead sovereign in this holy war.
Now on the murderer, whether he lurk
In lonely guilt, or have accomplices,
I syllable this curse : Let his crushed life
Wither forlorn in hopeless misery.
And, I pray Heaven, should he or they be housed
With mine own knowledge in my home, that I
May suffer what I imprecate on them.
On all of you I lay this charge, to give
Free course unto my words, for my behoof
And for the god, and for our land, that lies
A fruitless wilderness unblest of Heaven.
Sure, had this business not been thus enjoined
By oracle divine, it were not meet
Ye left pollution thus uncleansed, when one,
Your noblest and your sovereign, had been slain.
Even then you should have tracked it out. And now,

Since I am vested with his power, and share
 His rights in the embraces of the queen,
 And we had owned beside the further tie
 Of common issue, had his seed been blest—
 But Heaven was envious to him and his—
 I, as contending for my own true sire,
 Will do mine utmost, leaving nought untried,
 To bring to light the author of the death
 Of Laius the son of Labdacus,
 Of Polydorus, and of Cadmus old,
 And wise Agenor of the eldest time.
 Lastly, to all who disobey in this,
 May Heaven refuse the produce of the ground
 And offspring from their wives, and may they pine
 In such a plague as this, or yet more hateful.
 But for the rest of you Cadmeian men,
 Who love mine ordinance, may righteousness,
 Strong to defend, and all the gods for aye
 Watch over you for blessing in your land.

Ch. Under the shadow of thy curse, my lord,
 I will speak. I slew him not, nor can I show
 The slayer. Phœbus, who hath given the word,
 Should name the guilty.

Oed. Thy demand is just,
 But man may not compel the sons of Heaven.

Ch. I see a second course, and would suggest it.

Oed. Were it a third, stint not to speak it forth.

Ch. I know of one alone, who, being a king,
 Sees with King Phœbus eye to eye, Teirésias.
 From him, my lord, we might have certain redé.

Oed. That doth not count amongst my deeds un-
 done.

By Creon's counsel I have sent twice o'er
To fetch him, and I muse at his delay.

Ch. The rumour that remains is old and dim.

Oed. What rumour? Let no tale be left unheard.

Ch. 'Twas said he perished by some wandering band.

Oed. But the one witness is removed from ken.

Ch. Well, if the guilty have a taste of fear,
He will not stay when he hath heard thy curse.

Oed. Words will not frighten one who dares to do.

Ch. Yet lives there, who hath power to convict him :
For hither, lo ! they lead the holy seer,
Whose bosom is of truth the only home.

Enter TEIRESIAS.

Oed. O thou whose universal thought controls
All knowledge and all mystery, in heaven
And on the earth beneath, thy mind perceives,
Teirésias, though thine outward eye be dark,
The plague that holds our city, whose one guide
And saviour we can find in thee, O king.
Phœbus (although the messengers perchance
Have told thee this), upon our sending, sent
This answer back, that no release should come
From this disaster, till we sought and found
And slew the murderers of King Laius,
Or drove them exiles from our land. Thou, then,
Withhold not any word of augury
Or other divination which thou knowest,
But rescue Thebè, and thyself, and me,
And purge this dire pollution of the dead.
We cast ourselves on thee : and beautiful
It is to use the power one hath for good.

Teir. Ah ! terrible is knowledge to the man
Whom knowledge profits not. This well I knew,
But had forgotten. Else had I ne'er come hither.

Oed. Why dost thou come so gloomily to-day ?

Teir. Let me go home. Thy part and mine will best
Be carried, if thou wilt obey this word.

Oed. Rebellious and ungrateful ! to deprive
The State that reared thee of thine utterance now.

Teir. Thy speech, I see, is crossing thine intent ;
And I would screen me from the like mishap.

Oed. Nay, if thou knowest, turn thee not away :
Lo, all these suppliants are entreating thee.

Teir. Yea, for ye all are blind. Never will I
Utter the sound that will reveal thine evil.

Oed. What, art thou privy to the business then,
And wilt not tell, but hast a mind to be
Our traitor, and destroyer of the State ?

Teir. You press me to no purpose. I'll not pain
Myself or thee. You will get nothing from me.

Oed. O miscreant ! what ? Why, you would rouse, I ween,
The passion of anger in a stone ; wilt ne'er
Give utterance, but in thy temper prove
Still thus unsoftened and impracticable ?

Teir. My temper is your theme. Your own must dwell
Unnoticed in your bosom. Me you blame ?

Oed. Who could keep temper at such words as thou
Hast used to scorn this city ?

Teir. It will come :
Although I bury it in silence here.

Oed. Must not the king be told of what will come ?

Teir. No more from me. At this, and if thou wilt,
Rage to the height of passionate vehemence.

Oed. Ay, and my passion shall not spare to say
All that I now perceive. I see in thee
The abettor of the plot, and of the deed,
All but the handiwork. If thou hadst eyes,
Sole murderer had I declared thee too.

Teir. Is't possible? I charge thee to abide
By that thou hast proclaimed; and from this hour
Speak not to any Theban or to me.
Thou art the foul polluter of the land.

Oed. O shameless front! How canst thou move thy tongue
To such a tone, and think to 'scape for this?

Teir. The might of truth is scathless. I am free. [art.

Oed. Whence came the truth thou spak'st? Not from thine

Teir. From thee. Thou urged'st mine unwilling tongue.

Oed. Say it again, that I may know the drift.

Teir. Was it so dark? Or dost thou tempt my voice?

Oed. I cannot say 'twas clear. Speak it again.

Teir. I say thou art the regicide thou seekest.

Oed. Again the word of pain! But thou shalt rue.

Teir. Shall I speak something more, to feed thy wrath?

Oed. All is but idleness. Say what thou wilt.

Teir. I tell thee thou art living unawares
In shameful commerce with thy nearest blood,
Not seeing the abyss wherein thou liest.

Oed. Think you to triumph in offending still?

Teir. Yes, if the might of truth be anything.

Oed. It is, for other men, but not for thee,
Blind as thou art in eye and ear and mind.

Teir. O miserable reproach, which all who now
Behold thee, soon shall thunder forth on thee!

Oed. Nursed in unbroken night, thou canst not harm
Or me, or any man who seeth the day.

Teir. No, not from me proceeds thy fall ; the god,
Who cares for this, is able to perform it.

Oed. Came this device from Creon or thyself ?

Teir. Not Creon, thou thyself art thine own bane.

Oed. O wealth and sovereign power and skill o'er skill
Proudly prevailing in an envied life,
What boundless jealousies environ you !
If, for this rule, which to my hand the State
Committed unsolicited and free,
Creon, my first of friends, trusted and sure,
Would undermine and hurl me from my throne,
Insinuating such a mendicant
Patcher of wiles, this crafty wizard rogue,
Blind in his art, and seeing but for gain.
Tell me, when was thy divination sure ?
How came it, when the minstrel hound was here,
This town had no deliverance through thy word ?
Her riddle was not for the passer by
To solve, but needed the diviner's skill ;
No sign whereof was manifest in thee
By augury or inspiration given.
But it was left for a chance visitant,
The simple Oedipus, to end her lay :
Me, who had no intelligence from birds,
But hit upon the secret through my wit ;
Whom now you study to supplant, and think
To stand as a supporter of the throne
Of lordly Creon :—To your sorrow both
Thou and the hatcher of this scheme will drive
Pollution forth. Nought but the name of age
Protects thee now from tasting of thy fault.

Ch. As far as we may guess, the prophet's words

And thine, O Oedipus, are spoken in wrath.
That is not what we need, but to discern
How best to solve the heavenly oracle.

Teir. Though thou art sovereign here, the right of
speech

Is my prerogative no less. Not thee
I serve, but Loxias. He protects my life.
No need of Creon's arm to shelter me !
Now, then : my blindness is thy theme :—thou hast
Thine eyes, and seest not where thou art in ill,
What halls thou dost inhabit, or with whom.
Knowest not from whence thou art. Nay, to thy kin,
Buried in death and on the earth above,
Unwittingly art a most grievous foe.
And when thy father's and thy mother's curse
With fearful tread shall drive thee from this land,
On both sides lashing thee, thine eye so clear
Seeing but darkness in that day,—oh, then,
What harbourage will not receive thy cry,
What echo of Cithæron will be mute,
When thou perceiv'st, what bride-song in thy hall
Wafted thy gallant bark with flattering gale
To anchor,—where ? And other store of ill
Thou seest not, that shall equal thine estate
To thy true fortune and thy children's blood.
Then carp at noble Creon, and revile
My sacred utterance. No life on earth
More miserably shall be effaced, than thine.

Oed. Can I endure such words from him ? Begone
Off to thy ruin and with speed ! Away,
And take thy presence from our palace-halls.

Teir. Had you not sent for me, I ne'er had come.

Oed. I knew not you would utter foolishness,
Else had I never brought you to my door.

Teir. To thee I am foolish, then ; but to thy parents,
That gave thee life, I was wise.

Oed. Hold, go not ! who ?
Who gave me being ?

Teir. Thou shalt find this day
Thine origin and end.

Oed. Why wilt thou still
Speak all in riddles and dark sentences ?

Teir. Methought thou wast the man to find them out.

Oed. Ay, taunt me with the gift that makes me great !

Teir. And yet this luck hath been thine overthrow.

Oed. I care not, if I have preserved this city.

Teir. Then I will go. Come, sirrah, guide me forth.

Oed. Let him. For standing here you vex our eye,
But being gone, our trouble goes with you.

Teir. Ere I depart, I will declare the word
For which I came, not daunted by thy frown.
Thou hast no power to ruin me. 'Tis this.
The man you seek so earnestly, with threats
And proclamation loud of Laius' blood,
Is here, a sojourner supposed from far,
But time shall prove him to the light of day
A true-born Theban : nor will such event
Bring him great joy ; for, blind from having sight,
And beggared from prosperity, with staff
In stranger lands he shall feel forth his way ;
Shown living with the children of his loins,
Their brother and their sire, and to the womb
That bare him, husband-son, and to his father
Murderer and joint-begetter. Now go in,

Ponder my words; and if thou find'st them false,
Then term my prophet-gift a senseless skill.

CHORUS.

I. 1.

Whom hath the mystic stone
Declared to have done
Horrors unnameable with blood-stained hand?
With speed of storm-swift car
'Tis time he fled afar
With mighty footsteps hurrying from the land.
For, armed with lightning brand,
There leaps upon his track the son of Jove,
And close behind the unerring Destinies move.

I. 2.

Late from the snow-tipped height
This utterance sprang to light,
To hunt on every track the man unknown.
Through woodland caverns deep
And o'er the rocky steep
Like bull he ranges in the wilds alone,
With none to share his moan,
Shunning that prophet voice's central sound,
Which ever lives, and haunts him, hovering round.

II. 1.

My heart is stirred
With strange misgiving through the augur's word.
Nor yea nor nay
My mind will say,

But flutters betwixt hope and fear,
Seeing nor the present nor the future clear.

What strife had grown
Betwixt the son of Polybus and these
The heirs of Labdacus, was never known

Or yet to me confessed
By any certain test,
That I could bring to quench the popular praise
Of Oedipus, or with conviction strong
To vindicate a dark mysterious wrong.

II. 2.

Zeus and his son
Know surely all that o'er the earth is done :

But that the seer
Hath wisdom clear,
Or more endowment than the crowd,
Was never yet with evidence allowed.

A man by wit
May pass the bound another man hath won ;
But never, till I see fulfilment fit,

Will I confirm the blame
They cast upon his name.
Wise he was found beneath the searching sun,
And kind to Thebè, when the Sphinx came forth
And sang. My heart shall never doubt his worth.

Cr. Citizens, hearing that great Oedipus,
Our sovereign, hath been launching at my head
Dire accusation, I stand here resolved
Not to endure it. In the late events
If he imagine he hath ta'en from me

Handwritten note:
Nob - Avic -
Totellian
General
Germantown

Aught to his detriment by word or deed,
I am not careful to prolong my life
Beneath such imputation. For the harm
Of such a calumny importeth not
Some single business, but of all the chief,
That I be ill-reported in the State,
And hardly thought of by my friends and you.

Ch. Perchance 'twas but the sudden flash of wrath,
Not the deliberate judgment of the soul.

Cr. Who gave in evidence that the prophet spake
False prophecies at my suggestion?

Ch. Such was the word, I know not how advised.

Cr. And with a steady eye, and mind not frantic,
Was this dark obloquy denounced on me?

Ch. I cannot say. To what my betters do
I am blind. But see, the King comes forth again.

Oed. Insolent, art thou here? Hadst thou the face
To bring thy boldness near my palace-roof,
Convicted of contriving 'gainst my life
And laying robber hands upon my state?
I prithee tell, did you perceive in me
A coward or a fool, when you planned this?
Was't that I would not notice your attempt
Craftily creeping on, or, when perceived,
Not ward it off? Is't not a silly scheme,
To think to compass without troops of friends
Power, that is only won by wealth and men?

Cr. Wilt be advised? Hear but as much in turn
As thou hast spoken, and then thyself be judge.

Oed. I know thy tongue, but I am slow to learn
From thee, whom I have found my grievous foe.

Cr. First on this very point, hear me declare—

Oed. I will not hear that thou art not a villain.

Cr. Yours is a shallow judgment, if you think
Pride without knowledge can be any gain.

Oed. Yours is a shallow judgment, if you think
You can abuse your kinsman and be free.

Cr. Right. I assent to that. But I would learn
The nature of this wrong of which you speak.

Oed. Was it or was it not by your advice
I sent to bring the seeming-reverend seer ?

Cr. It was, and still I hold the counsel firm.

Oed. How long is't now, I pray, since Laius—

Cr. Performed what deed ? I do not catch your drift.

Oed. Vanished in ruin by a dire defeat ?

Cr. Were the time measured, it were long and old.

Oed. Well, did this prophet then profess his art ?

Cr. Wise then as now, nor less in reverence.

Oed. And in that period did he mention me ?

Cr. Not in my hearing.

Oed. But, I may presume,
Ye held an inquisition o'er the dead ?

Cr. Yes, we inquired, of course : and could not hear.

Oed. How had this wise man then no word of this ?

Cr. I speak but what I know. I cannot say.

Oed. Clear knowledge may allow you in one speech.

Cr. In what ? I will not gainsay, if I know.

Oed. That, had you not been at his ear, he ne'er
Had sought to fasten Laius' death on me.

Cr. You know if he said this. But I in turn
Would be the questioner, and ask thee this.—

Oed. Ask on. No questioning can prove me guilty.

Cr. Tell me. Hast thou my sister for thy queen ?

Oed. The fact is patent, and denial vain.

Cr. And shar'st with her dominion of this realm ?

Oed. All she desires is given her by my will.

Cr. Well, am not I third-partner with you twain ?

Oed. There is your villany in breaking fealty.

Cr. Not so, if thou wouldst reason with thyself

As I now reason. First consider this :

Who would choose power accompanied with fears

Before safe slumbers with an equal sway ?

'Tis not my nature, no, nor any man's

Whom modest wisdom rules, to love the place

Of domination rather than the power.

Now, without fear, I have my will from thee ;

But were I king, I should do much unwillingly.

How then can I desire to be a king,

When I have rule and lordship undisturbed ?

Delusion hath not gone so far with me

As to wish more than honour joined with gain.

Now all men count me happy, all embrace me ;

Now he that needs thee calls me to his side,

For on this chance his fortune wholly turns.

How should I leave this substance for that show ?

No man of sense can be a criminal.

Such wild ambition hath not my desires,

Nor could I bring myself to lend it aid.

If you would test me, go and ask again

If I brought Phœbus' answer truly back.

Nay more, if you shall find me to have planned

Any aught in collusion with the seer, destroy me,

Not with one vote, but two, mine own with thine.

But do not on a mere suspicion blame

My course of thine own will. To call good evil,

Or evil good, without clear cause, is sin.

And to cast off a worthy friend I call
 No less a folly than to fling away
 The life we love, that harbours in our breast.
 The certainty of this will come with time ;
 For time alone can prove the righteous man.
 One day suffices to proclaim the villain.

Ch. Prudence bids hearken to such words, my lord,
 For fear one fall. Swift is not sure in thought.

Oed. When he who hath designs on me is swift
 In his advance, I must bethink me swiftly.
 Should I wait leisurely, his secret work
 Is perfected, and mine hath missed success.

Cr. What would you then ? To thrust me from the land ?

Oed. Nay, death, not exile, is my wish for thee,
 When all have seen what envy brings on men.

Cr. You'll ne'er relent nor listen to my plea.

[*Oed.* You'll ne'er be governed or repent your guilt.]

Cr. Because I see you blind.

Oed. Not to my need.

Cr. Mine must be thought of too.

Oed. You are a villain.

Cr. Suppose you are all ignorance ?

Oed. My power

Must be maintained even then.

Cr. Authority

Sorts not with error.

Oed. O my citizens !

Cr. I have a part in them as well as you.

Ch. Cease, princes. Opportunely I behold
 Jocasta coming toward you from the palace.
 Her presence may attune your jarring minds.

Jocasta. Unhappy that ye are, why have ye reared

Your wordy rancour 'mid the city's harms ?
Have you no shame, to stir up private broils
In such a time as this ? Get thee within !
And thou, too, Creon ! nor enlarge your griefs
To make a mountain out of nothingness.

Cr. Sister, thy husband Oedipus declares
One of two horrors he will work on me,
Banishment from my native soil, or death.

Oed. Yes, for I caught him practising, my queen,
Against our person with malignant guile.

Cr. May comforts fail me and a withering curse
Destroy me, if I e'er tried aught of this.

Jo. I pray thee, husband, listen to his plea ;
Chiefly respecting his appeal to Heaven,
But also me, and these who stand by thee.

Ch. Incline to our request
Thy mind and will, O king !

Oed. What would you I should yield unto your prayer ?

Ch. Respect one ever wise,
Whose oath protects him now.

Oed. Know ye what thing ye ask ?

Ch. I know.

Oed. Then clearly tell.

Ch. Thy friend, whose voice is hallowed by his oath,
Rob not of honour through a dim surmise.

Oed. In asking that, you labour for my death
Or banishment. Of this be well assured.

Ch. No, by the Sun I swear,
Vaunt-courier of the host of heaven.
For may I die the last of deaths,
Unblest of God or friend,
If e'er such thought were mine.

But oh ! this pining land
 Afflicts my hapless soul,
 To think that to her past and present woe
 She must add this, that springs to her from you.

Oed. Then let him range, though I must die outright,
 Or be thrust forth with violence from the land.
 Not for his voice but thine, which wrings my heart :
 He, wheresoe'er he live, shall have my hate.

Cr. You show yourself as sullen when you yield,
 As unendurable in your fury's height.
 Such natures justly give themselves most pain.

Oed. Let me alone, then, and begone !

Cr. I go,
 Unchanged to these, though I have found thee blind.

Ch. Lady, why tarriest thou
 To lead thy husband in ?

Jo. I will, when ye have told me what hath passed.

Ch. Words without knowledge voiced a vague surmise ;
 And accusations, though unfounded, sting.

Jo. Came this from both of them ?

Ch. From both alike.

Jo. And what was the dispute ?

Ch. Enough for me,
 Amply enough it seemeth, when the land
 Is vexed already, not to wake what sleeps.

Oed. Observe where thou art landed, honest friend,
 Slackening my wrath, and bating my desire !

Ch. My prince, not once alone
 I spake it, but again.
 I should be clearly mad,
 Unfurnished of all sense,
 To loose my clasp from thee,

Who, when my land was sore distraught,
Didst speed her forth anew with favouring gale.
Now, too, if but thou may'st, be our good guide.

Jo. Let not thy queen be kept in ignorance
Why thou hast started such a power of wrath.

Oed. I'll tell thee, lady, for I honour thee
More than these citizens. 'Twas Creon there,
And his inveterate treason against me.

Jo. Accuse him : so you make the quarrel clear.

Oed. He saith I am the murderer of the king.

Jo. Of his own knowledge, or from others' word ?

Oed. He keeps his own lips free : but hath suborned
A knavish soothsayer to this wickedness.

Jo. List, now, to me, and set your heart at rest
On that you speak of, whilst I make you see
No mortal thing is touched by prophecy.
The proofs I show of this are brief and stern.
Word came to Laius once, I will not say
From Phœbus' self, but from his ministers,
That death should find him from his true-born son,
Who should of both of us be gendered.
And him, so rumour saith, strange robbers slew
One morn, where two roads parted ; but the child
Grew not three days, ere by my husband's hand
His feet were locked, and he was cast and left
By messengers on the waste mountain wold.
So Loxias neither brought upon the boy
His father's murder, nor on Laius
The thing he greatly feared, death by his son.
Such issues came of prophesying words,
Therefore regard them not. God can himself
With ease bring forth what for his ends he needs.

Oed. How my soul's depths are stirred on hearing thee,
My queen, what wildering fancies cloud my mind !

Jo. What care hath given this turn to thy discourse ?

Oed. Methought I heard thee say, King Laius
Was at a crossway felled with slaughtering stroke.

Jo. Such was the tale that still hath currency.

Oed. Where was the scene of this unhappiness ?

Jo. Phocis the land is named : the parted ways
Lead from one point to Daulia and to Delphi.

Oed. What time hath passed since this affair was known ?

Jo. 'Twas just ere you appeared with prospering speed
And took the kingdom, that these tidings came.

Oed. What are your purposes against me, gods ?

Jo. Why broods thy mind on such a thought, O king ?

Oed. Nay, ask me not. But tell me first, what height
Had Laius, and what share of manly bloom ?

Jo. Tall, with a head just silvered o'er with grey :
In shape and bearing much resembling thee.

Oed. O heavy fate ! 'Twould seem that even now
I flung myself unknowing on the curse.

Jo. How ?

I shudder as I gaze on thee, O king.

Oed. The dread appals me that the seer can see.
Tell one thing more to make it doubly clear.

Jo. I shrink to speak, but, when you ask, I will.

Oed. Had he scant following, or, like a prince,
Full numbers of a richly armed train ?

Jo. There were but five in all : a herald one :
And Laius travelled in the only car.

Oed. Woe ! woe ! 'Tis clear as daylight. Who was he
That brought you this intelligence, my queen ?

Jo. A household slave, who living 'scaped alone.

Oed. And may it be that he is now within ?

Jo. No, truly. When he came from yonder scene,
And saw thee on the throne with Laius dead,
He touched my hand, and made his instant prayer
That I would send him to o'er-look the flocks
And rural pastures, so to live as far
As might be from the very thought of Thebes.
And he obtained from me his suit. No slave
Could better merit richest boon than he.

Oed. Would he might come again immediately !

Jo. Doubtless he may. But why desire it thus ?

Oed. I fear me I have spoken far too much
In words that make me wish to see him come.

Jo. Well, so he shall. But 'tis my right to know
What in thy state goes heavily, my king.

* *Oed.* And thou shalt have it, when my thoughts have risen
To such a flight of wild expectancy.
To whom more worthy can I loose my heart
In travelling through such a perilous strait ?
My father was Corinthian Polybus,
And Meropè of Doris was my mother.
My life was held the noblest in esteem
Through all Achaia, till a chance appeared,
Deserving admiration, but, though strange,
Not worthy of the earnest heed I gave it.
For at a feasting once, over the wine,
One who had drunk his fill, called out to me,
'Hail, spurious foundling of thy foster-sire !'
I that one day the passion at my heart
Hardly controlled, but, on the morrow morn,
Went near and proved my parents, who were fierce
In wrath at him whose lips had broached this word.

For their part I was satisfied, but still
This vexed me, for the rumour would not die.
Unknown to both my parents then I went
To Pytho, where, as touching my desire,
Phœbus repulsed me; but brake forth instead
With other oracles of misery
And horrible misfortune, how that I
Must know my mother's shame, and manifest
A birth intolerable to human view,
And do to death the giver of my life.
I fled forth at the word, and, measuring now
Corinthia's region by the stars alone,
Went roaming, where I never might behold
Those shameful prophecies fulfilled on me.
So faring on, I reached the spot, where thou
Narratest the destruction of this king.
And, O my wife, I will hide nothing from thee.
When I drew near the cross-road that you speak of,
A herald, and a man upon a car,
Like your description, there encountered me.
And he that held the reins, and he himself,
The grey-beard, sought to force me from the path.
Then in mine angry mood, I sharply struck
The driver-man that turned me from the way;
Which when the elder saw, he watched for me
As I passed by, and from the vehicle
Smote full upon my head with the fork'd goad;
But paid no equal price, for, with a blow
From this right hand, smit by my staff, he fell
Instantly rolled from out the car supine.
I slew them every one. Now if there be
Aught of connexion or relationship

Betwixt yon stranger and King Laius,
 What wretch on earth was e'er so lost as I?
 Whom have the Heavens so followed with their hate?
 No house of Theban or of stranger here
 Must any more receive me, none henceforth
 Must speak to me, but drive me from the door!
 I, I have laid this curse on mine own head!
 Ay, and this arm that slew him now enfolds
 His queen. O cruel stain! Am I not vile?
 Polluted utterly! Yea, I must flee,
 And, lost to Thebè, nevermore behold
 My friends, nor tread my country, lest I meet
 In marriage mine own mother, and bring low
 The head that gave me life and reared me up,
 My father, Polybus. Ah! right were he
 Who should declare some god of cruel mood
 Hath sent this trouble on my soul. Ye powers,
 Worshipped in holiness, ne'er may I see
 That day, but perish from the sight of men,
 Ere such a brand be printed on my name!

Ch. We share thy fears, O king: yet lose not hope,
 Till thou hast heard the man who saw the deed.

Oed. Yea, that is all I still have left of hope,
 To bide the coming of the shepherd-man.

Jo. What eager thought attends his presence here?

Oed. I'll tell thee. Should his speech accord with thine,
 My life stands clear from this calamity.

Jo. What word of mine agreed not with the scene?

Oed. You said he spake of robbers in a band
 As having slain him. Now if he shall still
 Persist in the same number, I am free.
 One man and many cannot be the same.

But if he tell of one lone traveller,
Then, unavoidably, this guilt is mine.

Jo. So 'twas given out by him, be sure of that.
He cannot take it back. Not only I
But all the people heard him speak it so.
And should he swerve in aught from his first tale,
He ne'er will show the murder of the king
Rightly accordant with the oracle.
For Phœbus said expressly he should die
By him whom I brought forth. But that poor babe
Ne'er slew his sire, but perished long before.
And for my part, for word of prophecy
I ne'er will look this way nor that again.

Oed. Wisely resolved. But still send one to fetch
The labouring man, and be not slack in this.

Jo. I will, and quickly too. Go we within,
I will do nought but what may pleasure thee.

CHORUS.

I. 1.

Deep in my life, by Fate impressed,
Let holiness of word and action rest
And sinless thought, by those Eternal Laws
Controll'd, whose being Heaven alone did cause,
Nor have they drawn their birth
From mortal sires of Earth,
But tread the loftiest Ether, whence they came.
Ne'er shall oblivion tame
Their wakeful spirit; mighty is the power
Of God in these, nor knows the enfeebling hour.

I. 2.

From full-blown pride the tyrant springs.
Pride, when 'tis feasted over-much on things
Timeless and all unmeet, to topmost height
Soars madly, and then sinks to sudden night,
Midst foot-perplexing shocks
Of adamantine rocks,
Prepared for stumbling mortals by dark fate.
But to uphold the State
With help of God let men not cease to strive.
I'll own God my protector while I live.

II. 1.

Who walks disdainfully with hand or tongue,
Not fearing acts of wrong,
Nor reverencing each temple's holy shrine ?
A horrid fate be thine,
For thine abandoned greed,
Who seekest gain beyond thy rightful meed,
Nor sparest things divine,
And in thy madness touchest things accurst.
Who, when such crimes have burst,
Can look for shelter from the wrathful shower ?
If such a spirit be in power,
And gilded with preferment still advance,
What means my service in the sacred dance ?

II. 2.

No more I'll worship at Earth's central seat,
Nor Abæ's altar greet,

Nor bow before Olympia's brilliant lord,
 Unless for every mind
 This word fulfilment find,
 The event and prophecy in clear accord.
 If rightly we invoke
 Thy name, immortal ruler, mightiest Jove,
 Let not these courses prove
 Unvisited by thine eternal stroke.
 All heavenly sanctities are broke :
 The oracles to Laius given of old
 Vanish in scorn, and Phœbus' fear is cold.

Jo. Princes of Thebes, it came into my mind
 To stand before the holy altars here
 With frankincense and garlands. For the king,
 Betossed with fantasy, still runs his soul
 On wildest seas, nor, like a man whose thoughts
 Keep measure, tries things present by the past.
 Each tongue possesses him that harps on fear.
 Then, since my comforts do no good at all,
 To thee, for thou art nearest, Lycian god,
 I bring my supplication with full hand,
 To bid thee find for us some pure release.
 For seeing him, our captain, in distress,
 Like shipmen, we are all amazed with dread.

Messenger. Can you inform me, strangers, where to find
 The mansions of the sovereign Oedipus ?
 Or better, where he may himself be seen ?

Ch. These are the roofs you seek, and he, our
 lord,
 Is there within : and, stranger, thou behold'st
 The proud queen-mother of his princely race.

Mes. Happy, and with the happy may she live,
High-blest copartner of his royal state.

Jo. Be thou, too, blest, kind sir! Thy gracious tongue
Deserves no less. But tell me, what desire
You urge, or what intelligence you bring?

Mes. Good tidings for thy house and husband, queen.

Jo. What are they? who hath sent you to our hall?

Mes. From Corinth came I, and will quickly tell
What sure will please you, though perchance 'twill grieve.

Jo. What news can strike us with this twofold power?

Mes. 'Twas rumoured that the natives of the land
Of Corinth were about to make him king.

Jo. What? Is old Polybus not still in power?

Mes. The power of death confines him in the grave.

Jo. Hold there. How say you? Polybus in his grave?

Mes. May I die for him if I speak not true.

Jo. Quick, Cloë, run and tell this to my lord.
Voices of prophecy! where are ye now?
Long time hath Oedipus with trembling fear
Avoided Polybus, lest he should slay him,
Who now lies slain by fortune, not by him.

Oed. Jocasta, my dear queen, why didst thou send
To bring me hither from our palace-halls?

Jo. List to that man, and, when you hear him, judge
The ending of the dreadful prophecy.

Oed. Who is the man, and what his message here?

Jo. He comes from Corinth, to announce to thee
That Polybus, thy father, is no more.

Oed. What, stranger? Let me hear it from thy mouth.

Mes. If my first duty is to make this clear,
Be without doubt that he is dead and gone.

Oed. By sickness coming o'er him, or by guile?

Mes. Light force subdues to rest the aged frame.

Oed. It seems he died of sickness then, poor soul !

Mes. By sickness and the number of his years.

Oed. Ah ! my Jocasta, who again will heed
The Pythian hearth oracular, and birds
Screaming in air, blind guides ! that would have given
My father's murder to mine hand ; but he
Hides underground in death, while I stand here
Harmless and weaponless : unless, perchance,
My absence killed him, so he may have died
Through me. But be that as it may, the grave,
That covers Polybus from sight, hath closed
One voice of prophecy, worth nothing now.

Jo. Did I not tell you so, long since ?

Oed.

You did.

But I was drawn to error by my fear.

Jo. Now cast it altogether out of mind.

Oed. Must I not fear my mother's marriage-bed ?

Jo. Why should man fear ? seeing his course is ruled
By fortune, and he nothing can foreknow ?
'Tis wise to live at will as best one may.
Then fear not thou thy mother's nuptial.
Many a man ere now in dreams hath lain
With her who bare him. He hath easiest life
Who with such omens troubleth not his mind.

Oed. All this would be well spoken, were not she
Alive that gave me birth. But since she lives,
Though you speak well, yet have I cause for fear.

Jo. Your father's burial might enlighten you.

Oed. It doth. But I am darkened by a life.

Mes. What lady is the subject of your fears ?

Oed. Merope, aged friend, who lived with Polybus.

Mes. What touching her inclineth you to fear ?

Oed. A heaven-sent oracle of dreadful note.

Mes. May it be told, or must no stranger know ?

Oed. Surely it may. Word came from Loxias once
That I must know my mother's shame, and shed
With these my hands mine own true father's blood.
Wherefore long since my home hath been removed
Far from Corinthia : not unhappily ;
But still our parents' eyes are sweet to see.

Mes. Did fear of this make you so long an exile ?

Oed. Horror of this and parricide, old friend.

Mes. Since friendly was my coming, I would fain
Free thee from this anxiety, my king.

Oed. Our gratitude would well reward thy love.

Mes. Hope of reward from thee in thy return
Was the chief motive of my coming hither.

Oed. Return ? Not to my parents' dwelling-place.

Mes. Son, 'tis too clear, you know not what you do.

Oed. Why, aged sir ? For Heaven's sake teach me this.

Mes. If for these reasons you avoid your home.

Oed. The fear torments me, Phœbus may prove true.

Mes. Lest from your parents you receive a stain ?

Oed. That is the life-long torture of my soul.

Mes. Will you be certified your fears are groundless ?

Oed. How groundless, if I am my parents' child ?

Mes. Because with Polybus thou hadst no kin.

Oed. Why ? Was not he the author of my life ?

Mes. As much as I am, and no more than I.

Oed. How can my father be no more to me
Than who is nothing ?

Mes. In begetting thee
Nor I nor he had any part at all.

Oed. Why then did he declare me for his son ?

Mes. Because he took thee once a gift from me.

Oed. Was all that love unto a foundling shown ?

Mes. Heirless affection so inclined his heart.

Oed. You gave me to him then ? your own, or bought ?

Mes. Found in Cithæron's hollowy wilderness.

Oed. What led your travelling footstep to that ground ?

Mes. The flocks I tended grazed the mountain there.

Oed. A shepherd wast thou, and a wandering hind ?

Mes. Whatever else, my son, thy saviour then.

Oed. From what disaster that you saw me rue ?

Mes. Thine instep bears memorial of that pain.

Oed. Oh ! what old evil will thy words disclose ?

Mes. Your feet were pierced till I unfastened them.

Oed. Sad outrage in the bands of infancy !

Mes. From this adventure thou hast ta'en thy name.

Oed. Ah ! tell me, did my father do this thing,

Or was't my mother ?

Mes. That I dare not say.

He knoweth best who gave thee to my hand.

Oed. Another gave me, then ? You did not find me ?

Mes. Another herdsman passed thee on to me.

Oed. Can you describe him ? Tell us what you know.

Mes. He was called one of Laius' people, sure.

Oed. Of Laius once the sovereign of this land ?

Mes. Yea, surely, he was shepherd of his flock.

Oed. And is he still alive for me to see ?

Mes. You Thebans are most likely to know that.

Oed. Say, any one of you in presence here,

If you can tell me of the swain he speaks of,

In town or country having known of him ?

The time for this discovery is full come.

Ch. Methinks it is no other than the peasant
Whom thou didst seek before to see : but this
Could best be told by Queen Jocasta there.

Oed. We lately urged that one should come, my queen.
Know you, is this of whom he speaks the same ?

Jo. What matter who ? Regard not, nor desire
Even vainly to remember aught he saith.

Oed. When I have found such tokens of my birth,
I must disclose it.

Jo. As you love your life,
By Heaven I beg you, search no further here.
The sickness in my bosom is enough.

Oed. Nay, never fear. Were I proved thrice a slave
And waif of bondwomen, you still are noble.

Jo. Yet hearken, I implore you : do not so.

Oed. I cannot hear you. I must know this out.

Jo. With clear perception I advise the best.

Oed. This 'best' of yours is ever mine annoy.

Jo. Wretched one, never may you know your birth.

Oed. Will some one go and bring the herdsman hither ?
Leave her to revel in her lordly line.

Jo. O horrible ! O lost one ! This alone
I speak to thee, and no word more for ever. [*Exit.*

Ch. Oedipus, wherefore is Jocasta gone,
Driven madly by wild grief ? I needs must fear
Lest from this silence she make sorrows spring.

Oed. Let her ! Yet I will choose to know my birth
Though from an humble seed. Her woman's pride
Is shamed, it may be, by my lowliness.
But I, whilst I account myself the son
Of prospering fortune, ne'er will be disgraced.
For she is my true mother : and the months

Coheirs with me of the same father Time
Have marked my lowness and mine exaltation.
So born, so nurtured, I can fear no change,
That I need shrink to delve this to the root.

CHORUS.

I. 1.

If I wield a prophet's might,
Or have sense to search aright,
Cithæron, when to-night the moon rides high,
Loud thy praise shall be confessed,
How upon thy rugged breast,
Thou, mighty mother, nursedst tenderly
Great Oedipus, and gav'st his being room
Within thy spacious home.
Yea, we will dance and sing
Thy glory for thy friendship to our king.
Phœbus, unto thee we cry,
Be this pleasing in thine eye!

I. 2.

Who, my child, hath given thee birth
Of the long-lived nymphs of earth?
Say, was she clasped by mountain-roving Faun,
Or beguiled she one sweet hour
With Apollo in her bower,
Who loves to trace the wide uncultured lawn?
Or was the ruler of Cyllenè's height
The author of thy light?
Or did the Bacchic god,
Who makes the top of Helicon to nod,
Take thee for a foundling care
From his playmates that are there?

Oed. If haply I, who never saw his face,
Thebans, may guess, methinks I see the hind,
Whose coming we have longed for. Both his age,
Agreeing with the other's wintry locks,
Chimes with my supposition, and the garb
Of his conductors is well known to me
As that of my own people. But thyself
In perfect knowledge art my better here,
Whose eyes have seen the herdsman in the past.

Ch. I know him well, believe me. Laius
Had no more faithful shepherd than this man.

Oed. Corinthian friend, I first appeal to you :
Was't he you spake of ?

Mes. 'Twas the man you see.

Oed. Turn thine eyes hither, aged friend, and tell
What I shall ask thee. Wast thou Laius' slave ?

2d Mes. I was, not bought, but bred within the house.

Oed. What charge or occupation was thy care ?

2d Mes. Most of my time was spent in shepherding.

Oed. And where didst thou inhabit with thy flock ?

2d Mes. 'Twas now Cithæron, now the neighbouring tract.

Oed. And hadst thou there acquaintance of this man ?

2d Mes. Following what service ? Who is he you mean ?

Oed. He who stands here. Say, hast thou met with him ?

2d Mes. I cannot bring him all at once to mind.

Mes. No marvel, good my lord. But I will clearly
Wake to remembrance his long slumbering sense.
For well I wot he knoweth of the time
When he with his two flocks and I with one
Beside him grazed Cithæron's pasture wide
Good six months' space of three successive years,
From spring to rising of Arcturus ; then

For the bleak winter-time I drove my charge

To their own folds, he his to Laius' stalls.

Is this the truth, or do I stray from fact ?

2d Mes. The time is far remote. But all is true.

Mes. Well, dost remember having given me then

A child, that I might foster him for mine ?

2d Mes. What means this question ? Let me know thy
drift.

Mes. Friend, yonder is the infant whom we knew.

2d Mes. Confusion seize thee, and thine evil tongue !

Oed. Check not his speech, I pray thee, for thy words
Call more than his for chastisement, old sir.

2d Mes. What, mighty sovereign, is mine error here ?

Oed. Not answering about the child he asks of.

2d Mes. He knows not what he saith. His end is vain.

Oed. Thou wilt not speak to please us, but the lash
Will make thee speak.

2d Mes. By all that's merciful,
Scourge not this aged frame !

Oed. Pinion him straight !

2d Mes. Unhappy ! wherefore ? what is't you would know ?

Oed. Gave you the child he asks of to this man ?

2d Mes. I gave it him. Would I had died that hour !

Oed. Speak rightly, or your wish will soon come true.

2d Mes. My ruin comes the sooner, if I speak.

Oed. You mean to keep us in suspense, I see.

2d Mes. Not I. I said long since, 'I gave the child.'

Oed. Whence ? Was't your own, or from another's home

2d Mes. 'Twas not mine own, another gave it me.

Oed. What Theban gave it from what house in Thebes

2d Mes. O, I implore thee, master, ask no more !

Oed. You perish, if I have to ask again.

2d Mes. The child was of the stock of Laius.

Oed. Slave-born, or rightly of the royal line?

2d Mes. He was given out for Laius' son: but she,
Thy queen, within the palace, best can tell.

Oed. How? did she give it thee?

2d Mes. My lord, she did.

Oed. With what commission?

2d Mes. I was to destroy him.

Oed. And could a mother's heart be steeled to this?

2d Mes. By fear of evil prophecies.

Oed. What were they?

2d Mes. 'Twas said the child should be his father's
death.

Oed. What then possessed thee to give up the child
To this old man?

2d Mes. Pity, my sovereign lord!
Supposing he would take him far away
Unto the land whence he was come. But he
Preserved him to great sorrow. For if thou
Art whom he gives thee out, be well assured
Thou bear'st a heavy doom.

Oed. O horrible!
Horrible! All is known, as sunlight clear!
O may I nevermore behold the day,
Since proved accursèd, in my parentage,
In those I live with, and in those I slew.

Ch. O tribes of living men,
How nothing-worth I count you while ye stand!
For who of all the train
Draws more of happiness into his hand
Than to seem bright, and, seeming, fade in gloom?
O Oedipus, in thine all-hapless doom

Too clearly 'tis expressed
Nought in mortality is blest.
Thou, that with peerless might did hit
The centre, and destroy by wit
The taloned songstress, as a tower
Saving my land from death's dark power,
And winning for thyself the name
Of Thebè's king, and noblest fame
And fulness of triumphal bliss.
But now whose story mournfuller is ?
Who so in life's vicissitude
Hath fellowship with fortune rude,
Checkless calamity and boundless pain ?

O Oedipus renowned,
Who in one haven found
Room both for son and sire
To haunt with nuptial fire,
Ah ! how couldst thou so long remain
The furrower of thy father's field,
Borne patiently and unrevealed ?
Crimes from thyself concealed
All-searching Time hath opened to the day,
And shown thee with clear ray,
Long while in hideous bond, spouse, father, child.
O Laius' fatal son,
Would I had ne'er thee known !
My heart cries loud for thee
In tones of agony,
And frenzied exclamation wild.
For, to speak sooth, thou didst renew my life,
And gav'st mine eye sweet respite after strife.

Enter 3D MESSENGER.

3d Mes. O ye whom Thebè still hath chosen in chief
To honour, what a spectacle of woe
Awaits your eyes, your ears; what piercing grief
Your hearts must suffer, if as kinsmen should
Ye still regard the house of Laius!
Not Phasis, nor the Danube's rolling flood
Can ever wash away the stains, and purge
This mansion of the horror that it hides.
And more it soon shall give to light, not now
Unconsciously determined. Of all ill,
Self-chosen sorrows are the worst to bear.

Ch. What hast thou new to add? the weight of grief
From that we know burdens the heart enough.

3d Mes. Soon spoken and soon heard is the chief
sum.

Jocasta's royal head is sunk in death.

Ch. The hapless queen! What was the fatal cause?

3d Mes. Her own determination. Those who saw
Felt more of pain than ever can be told.
Yet to the summit of my memory's power
The wretched lady's passion you shall hear.
When she had passed in her rash mood within
The vestibule, straight to the bridal bed
She rushes, tearing with both hands her hair.
Then having entered, pulling fast the door,
She called aloud on Laius, long dead,
With living memory of that far-off joy,
From which he died, and left the mother-queen
To breed a hideous offspring for his son.
And loudly o'er the bed she mourned, where she,

All hapless, had brought forth a twofold brood,
Husband from husband, children from a child.
We could not know the moment of her death,
Which followed soon, for Oedipus with cries
Burst in, and would not let us see her end,
But drew all eyes as he careered the hall,
Demanding arms, and where to find his wife,—
No, not his wife, but fatal mother-croft,
Cropped doubly with himself and his own seed.
And in his rage some demon pointed him
The way,—for 'twas no man of us at hand.
And with a fearful shout, as following
Some leader, he assailed the folding doors.
Then hollowing inwards from the mortised bolts
The yielding boards, he breaks into the room;
Where high suspended we beheld the queen,
In twisted cordage violently swung.
And he with terrible outcry when he saw,
Poor king! undid the hanging noose. But when
She lay upon the ground, 'twas terrible
To see what followed. For he tore away
The brooch-pins that had fastened her attire,
And, lifting, smote his eyeballs to the root,
Saying, Henceforth they should not see the evil
Suffered or done by him in the past time,
But evermore in darkness now should scan
The features he ought never to have seen,
And not-discern the souls he longed to know.
Chanting this strain, not once but oftentimes
He dashed the points into his eyes; and soon
The bleeding pupils moistened all his beard,
Nor stinted the dark flood, but all at once

The ruddy hail poured forth with plenteous shower.
Thus from two springs, from man and wife together,
Burst the joint evil that is now o'erflowing.
And the old happiness in that past day
Was truly happy, but the present hour
Hath groaning, death, disaster, shame, all ill
Without exemption, that hath e'er been named.

Ch. And finds the sufferer now some pause of woe ?

Mes. He cries to ope the portal and display.
To all the men of Thebè him who slew
His father, who unto his mother did
What I dare not repeat, and fain would fling
His person from the land, nor calmly bide
The shock of his own curse in his own hall.
His case craves succour and some guiding hand :
For such a load of misery who can bear ?
Thyself shalt judge : for, lo, the palace-gate
Is opening, and thou wilt quickly see
A hateful sight, yet one thou needs must pity.

Ch. O horror of the world !
Too great for mortal eye !
Terrible beyond all my life hath known !
What madness, O poor head !
Assailed thee ? Who in heaven
Hath leap'd against thy hapless lot
With boundings out of measure fierce and huge ?
Ah ! wretched one, I cannot look on thee :
No, though I long to search, to ask, to learn.
Thine aspect is too horrible. I cannot !

Oed. Oh ! miserable am I.
Where am I borne ? Ah woe !
Where do these accents flow,

Tossed waveringly ?

O Genius ! whither hath thy fury soar'd ?

Ch. To a pitch too dread for speech, by sight abhorr'd

Oed. O cloud of dark, on me

Sent loweringly !

Hideous, unutterable,

Invincible !

Too surely wafted on.

Ah me ! Again I moan.

These piercing wounds with agonizing smart

Sharpen the pang of memory at mine heart.

Ch. No marvel, if in this assault of woe

Thy miseries with redoubled fulness flow.

Oed. Friend of the years that were,

O constant kind !

Still dost thou tend the blind,

Unwearied in thy care !

Ah ! 'tis thy voice, I know thee by that tone ;

Dark though I be, thou dost not lurk unknown.

Ch. Agent of horror ! whence hadst thou the force

To waste those orbs ? what power impelled thy course ?

Oed. Apollo's was the power, Apollo wrought my woe :

But mine, and no man's else, the hand that struck
the blow.

Why, friends, should I have sight,

When nought could meet my vision with delight ?

Ch. Ay, thou say'st truly there !

Oed. What could I see, what hear,

That e'er again could move

My heart with love, or sweetly soothe mine ear ?

Friends, with what speed ye may

Lead me from hence away,

Me the accursèd thing,
Ruined and ruining,
Ay, and o'er all on Earth by Heaven abhorr'd.

Ch. Not least unhappy for thy depth of heart !

Would I had never known thee who thou art !

Oed. Perish, who 'midst the wild from cruel fettering
band

Took me and saved from death, vain kindness, idly
plann'd !

Had I but perished then,

Nor I, nor those I loved, had known this pain.

Ch. I join thee in that prayer.

Oed. Then I had ne'er been shown

My father's slayer, nor known

My mother's bridal in the face of men.

Now, heaven-abandonèd,

Of crime and horror bred,

I have shared a father's bed.

What woe ranks highest in ill ? my life hath found
that word.

Ch. I know not how to call thee wise in this,
Better be out of life than blindly live.

Oed. That this last act hath not been for the best
Censure me not, nor counsel me again.

For how, if I had eyes, could I have looked

In Hades on my father's countenance,

Or my all-hapless mother, when, toward both,

Crimes worse than capital are on my head ?

Ah ! but my children were a sight of joy,

Offspring of such a union ! were they so ?

Never, to eyes of mine ! nor town, nor tower,

Nor holy fanes o' the gods, which I myself,

O misery, have sundered from myself,
I, dowered with fairest life of Theban men,
Proclaiming to drive off from every door
Whom Heaven had marked for impious and impure,
Nay worse, of Læius born ! And was I then,
By mine own process branded thus, to look
On Theban faces with unaltered mien ?
Nay verily ; but had there been a way
To stop the hearing fountain through the ear,
I had not faltered, but had closed and barred
Each gate of this poor body ; deaf and blind !
So thought might sweetly dwell at rest from harm.
Cithæron ! Why didst take me to thy breast,
Not slaying me then and there ? So had I not
Told to the world the horror of my birth.
O foster-home of Corinth and her king,
How bright the life ye cherished, filming o'er
What foulness far beneath ! For I am vile,
And vile have been my parents. So 'tis proved.
O cross-road in the covert of the glen,
O thicket in the gorge where three ways met,
Bedewed by these my hands with mine own blood,
From whence I sprang—have you forgotten me ?
Or doth some memory haunt you of the deeds
I did before you, and then came and wrought
Fresh horrors here ? O doubly cursèd womb !
That gendered me, and then again sent forth
New offsets from the seed so genderèd :
Mazing the world with dire confusion
Of father, brother, son, bride, mother, wife,
Murder of parents, and all shames that are.
But for that in respect of hideous deeds

Silence is commendable, I beg you now
 To hurl me forth at once from human view.
 Slay me outright, or fling me far to sea,
 Where ye may never look on me again.
 Come, lend your hand unto my misery.
 Comply, and fear not, for my strain of woe
 Is incommunicable to all but me.

Ch. With timely presence to fulfil thy word
 With act and counsel, Creon comes, who now
 Is regent o'er our city in thy room.

Oed. Alas, what shall I say to him? What plea
 Will hold for my defence? My wickedness
 Towards him in all the past is clearly seen.

Cr. I come not, Oedipus, to mock thy woes,
 Or to reproach thee for thine evils past.
 But ye, if all respect of mortal eye
 Be dead, let awe of the universal flame
 Of life's great nourisher, our lord the Sun,
 Forbid your holding thus unveiled to view
 This huge abomination, which nor Earth
 Nor sacred Element, nor light of Heaven
 Can once endure. Convey him in with speed.
 Religion bids that kindred eyes and ears
 Alone should witness kindred crime and woe.

Oed. By Heaven, since thou hast wrenched me from
 my fear,
 So nobly meeting my unworthiness,
 I pray thee hear me for thine own behoof.

Cr. What boon dost thou desire so earnestly?

Oed. Fling me with utmost swiftness from the
 land,
 Where I may never speak with mortal more.

Cr. Doubt not I would have done so, but the god
Must first be questioned for our guidance here.

Oed. Sure unequivocal was his behest,
The parricide, the impious, should be slain.

Cr. So it was spoken : but, in such a time,
We needs must be advised more perfectly.

Oed. And will ye ask him for a wretch like me ?

Cr. Yes. For even thou methinks wilt now believe.

Oed. Not only so. But I will charge thee too,
With urgent exhortation, to perform
The funeral rite for her who lies within—
She is thy kinswoman—howe'er thou wilt.
But never let this city of my sires
Claim me for living habitant, but there
Leave me to range the mountains, where my nurse
Cithæron, echoeth with my name, Cithæron,
Which both my parents destined for my grave.
So my true murderers will be my death.
Yet one thing I can tell. Mine end will come
Not by disease nor human casualty.
I had not lived when at the point to die,
But for some terrible doom. Then let my fate
Run out its full career. But for my children
Thou, Creon, shalt provide. As for my sons,
I pray thee burden not thyself with them.
They ne'er will lack subsistence—they are men.
But my poor maidens, hapless and forlorn,
Who never had a meal apart from mine,
But ever shared my table, yea, for them
Take heedful care ; and grant me, if but once,
Yea, I beseech thee, with these hands to feel,
Thou noble heart ! the forms I love so well,

And weep with them our common misery.
Oh, if my arms were round them, I might seem
To have them, as of old, when I could see.
What? Am I fooled once more, or do I hear
My dear ones weeping? And hath Creon sent,
Pitying my sorrows, mine own children to me
That most I love? Can this be truth I utter?

Cr. Yea. I have done it. For I knew the joy
Thou still hast felt in this, thy comfort now.

Oed. Fair be thy fortune, then, and, for this speed,
God guard thee better than he watched o'er me.
Where are ye, O my children? Come, draw near
To these my hands of brother blood with you,
Hands that have thus provided for your gaze
The once bright lustre of your father's eyes,
Of mine, who, ignorant and unaware,
Became your father at that fount of life,
My children, where I quickened! Oh! for you
I weep, not seeing you, when I take thought
Of all the bitter passages of fate
That yet await you amongst men. For where
Can ye find fellowship, what civic throng,
What feast, can ye resort to, but instead
Of seeing aught, ye will come weeping home?
And when ye reach the marriageable bloom,
My daughters, who will be the man to cast
His lot with the unfortunate, and take
All those reproaches on his name, which fall
So heavily on my parents and on you?
What evil is not here? You father slew
His father, and then eared the mother-field,
Where he himself was sown, and got you from

The source of his own birth. Such taunts will fly.
 And who will marry you ? No man, my daughters ;
 But ye must wither childless and unwed.
 Son of Menœceus, who alone art left
 As father to them twain : for we, their parents,
 Who gave them birth, are utterly undone :
 Suffer them not, being your kinswomen,
 To wander desolate and poor, nor make
 Their lot perforce the counterpart of mine.
 But have compassion on their youth, thus left
 Forlorn of all protection save from thee.
 Noble one, seal this promise with thy hand.
 For you, my children, were ye of an age
 To ponder speech, I would have counselled you
 Full carefully. Now I would have you pray
 To dwell where 'tis convenient, that your life
 May find more blessing than your father knew.

Cr. Thou hast had enough of weeping. Close thee in thy
 chamber walls.

Oed. I must yield, though sore against me.

Cr. Yes, for strong occasion calls.

Oed. Know'st thou on what terms I yield it ?

Cr. Tell me, let me hear and know.

Oed. That you send me from the country.

Cr. God alone can let thee go.

Oed. But the gods long since abhor me.

Cr. This the sooner thou wilt gain.

Oed. Then consent.

Cr. 'Tis not my wont to venture promises in vain.

Oed. Lead me now within the palace.

Cr. Come, but let thy children be.

Oed. Tear not these from my embraces !

Cr. Think not all things are for thee.
Even the good thou once obtainedst hath not held thy life
in fee.

CHORUS.

Ye who dwell in Thebes our city, fix on Oedipus your eyes,
Who resolved the dark enigma, noblest liver and most wise.
Glorious, like a sun he mounted, envied of the popular
throng;
Now he sinks in seas of anguish, quenched the stormy
waves among.
Therefore I await the final hour, to ancient wisdom known,
Ere I call one mortal happy. Never shall that thought be
shown,
Till he end his earthly being, scathless of a sigh or groan.

PHILOCTETES.

THE PERSONS.

ULYSSES.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

CHORUS OF MARINERS.

PHILOCTETES.

MESSENGER, *disguised as a Merchantman.*

HERCULES, *appearing from the sky.*

THE ARGUMENT.

It was fated that Troy should be taken by Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, assisted by the bow of Hercules in the hands of Philoctetes.

Now Philoctetes had been rejected by the army because of a trouble in his foot, that made his presence insufferable, and had been cast away by Ulysses on the island of Lemnos.

But when the decree of fate was revealed by prophecy, Ulysses undertook to bring Philoctetes back, and took with him Neoptolemus, whose ambition could only be gratified by the return of Philoctetes with his bow.

Philoctetes was resolutely set against returning, and Neoptolemus is persuaded by Ulysses to take him with guile.

But the youth's ingenuous nature is so wrought upon through pity and remorse, that his sympathy and native truthfulness at length overcome his ambition.

When the inward sacrifice is complete, Hercules appears from heaven, and by a few words changes the mind of Philoctetes, so that all ends well.

PHILOCTETES.

ULYSSES—NEOPTOLEMUS.

Ul. Sea-girdled, uninhabited, untrod
Save by wild creatures, is this Lemnian shore.
Where,—O thou noble son of noblest sire,
Achilles-born Neoptolemus,—where I,
Set to this task by strong authority,
Cast forth erewhile old Pœas' Melian son,
His foot dark-dripping with the festering plague;
When with his cries, that frightened holy rest,
Filling the camp, he troubled every rite
Of sacrifice and drink-offering, that none
Might touch them, but his noise disturbed our peace.
But why these words? No moment this for talk;
Lest he discern my coming, and confound
The scheme, wherewith I think to catch him soon.
Now most behoves thy service, to explore
The twofold mouth of such a cavernous rock,
Where in cold weather two may sit i' the sun,
At either entrance, and in summer time
The circling breeze through the deep nook bears sleep.
And, something lower down, upon the left,
Unless 'tis dried, thine eye may note a spring.

Go near now silently, and make me know
If here or elsewhere be the place I seek for,
That I may tell and thou may'st hear the rest,
And we may act in concert for the best.

Ne. Mine honoured lord, this journey is not far.
Methinks I see the cave of which thou speakest.

Ul. Where? let me see it. Above there, or below?

Ne. Yonder, above. And yet I hear no tread.

Ul. Look if he be not lodged in slumber there.

Ne. I find no inmate, but an empty room.

Ul. What? no provision, nor no household care?

Ne. A leafy pallet for some harbouring wight.

Ul. Nought else beneath the roof? Is all forlorn?

Ne. A cup of wood, some feeble craftsman's skill,
And, close at hand, these sticks for striking fire.

Ul. That store is his. I read the token clear.

Ne. Oh! and these festering rags give evidence,
Steeped in the humours of some pestilent sore.

Ul. The man inhabits here: I know it now.
And sure he's not far off. How can he range,
Whose limb drags heavy with an ancient harm?
But he's gone either to bring forage home
Or to some place where healing herbs are known.
Send therefore thine attendant to look forth,
Lest unawares he find me. All our host
Were not so fair a prize to him as I.

Ne. My man is going, and shall watch the path.
What more dost thou desire of me? Say on.

Ul. Son of Achilles, know that thou art here
To serve us nobly, not with strength alone,
But, faithful to thy mission, if so be,
To do things strange, unwonted to thine ear.

Ne. What dost thou bid me ?

U.

'Tis thy duty now

To entrap the mind of Pœas' son with words.

When he shall ask thee, who and whence thou art,

Tell thy true name and parentage. Not this

I bid thee to conceal. But for thy voyage,

'Tis homewards, leaving the Achæan host,

With perfect hatred hating them, because

They who had drawn thee with strong prayers from home,

Their only hope for taking Troy, refused

Thy just demand to have thy father's arms,

But, ere thy coming, wrongly gave them o'er

Unto Ulysses : and on this launch forth

In fiercest crimination at my head.

That will not pain me : but if thou reject

This counsel, thou wilt trouble all our host.

For, if his bow shall not be ta'en, thy life

Will ne'er be crowned through Troy's discomfiture.

Now let me show, why thine approach to him

Is safe and trustful as mine cannot be.

Thou didst sail forth, not to redeem thine oath,

Nor by constraint, nor with the foremost band.

All which reproaches I must take : and he,

But seeing me, while master of his bow,

Will slay me, and my ruin will be thine.

This point then craves our cunning, to obtain

By subtilty the irresistible bow.

Thy nature was not framed, I know it well,

For speaking falsehood, or contriving harm.

But, for 'tis sweet to triumph in success,

Endure it. We'll be just another day.

But now, for one brief moment, give thyself

To serve me without shame, and then for aye
Hereafter be the pearl of righteousness.

Ne. The thing that vexes me in speech to hear,
Son of Laërtes, I abhor to do.

'Tis not my nature, no, nor, as they tell,
My father's, to work aught by craft and guile.
But I will undertake to bring the man
By force, and not by stratagem. For, sure,
With his one foot he ne'er will quell us all.
Being sent, my lord, to serve thee, I am loth
To be called traitor. But I rather choose
To fail with honour, than to win by wrong.

Ul. Son of a valiant sire, I, too, in youth,
Had once a slow tongue and an active hand.
But, since I proved the world, I see o'er all
Words and not deeds are masters amongst men.

Ne. What then is thy command? To lie? No more?

Ul. To entangle Philoctetes by deceit.

Ne. Why through deceit? May not persuasion fetch
him?

Ul. Never. And force as certainly will fail.

Ne. What hath he to assure him of such might?

Ul. Escapeless arrows, purveyors of death.

Ne. Then to approach him is a task of fear.

Ul. Unless with subtilty, as I have said.

Ne. And is not lying shameful to thy soul?

Ul. Not if by lying I can save my soul.

Ne. How must one look in speaking such a word?

Ul. Where gain invites, this shrinking is not good.

Ne. What gain I through his journeying back to Troy?

Ul. These arms alone have power to take Troy-town.

Ne. And am not I the spoiler, as was said?

Ul. Thou without them, they without thee, are
powerless.

Ne. If it be so, they must be sought and won.

Ul. Yea, for in this two prizes will be thine.

Ne. What? When I learn them I will not refuse.

Ul. Wisdom and virtue joined in one good name.

Ne. Shame, to the winds! Come, I will do this
thing.

Ul. Say, dost thou bear my counsel full in mind?

Ne. Doubt not, since once for all I have embraced it.

Ul. Thou, then, wait here till he return, but I
Will go, for fear my presence should be seen,
And take back our attendant to the ship.
And then once more, should ye appear to waste
The time unduly, I will send again
This same man hither in disguise, transformed
To the strange semblance of a merchantman;
From dark suggestions of whose crafty tongue,
Thou, O my son, shalt gather timely rede.
Now to my ship. This charge I leave to thee.
May secret Hermes guide us to our end,
And civic Pallas, named of victory,
The sure protectress of my devious way.

Ch. Strange in a stranger land,
What shall I speak? What hide,
From a man who suspecteth all?
Tell me, O master mine.
Skill above skill is with him,
Wisdom surpassing the rest,
Who with the Jove-given wand
Wieldeth the Heaven-sent power.
This unto thee, O my child,

Fraught with ancestral might,
This to thy life now is come.
Wherefore I bid thee declare,
What must I do for thy need ?

Ne. Even now methinks thou longest to espy
Near ocean's marge the place where he doth lie.
Gaze without fear. But when the traveller stern,
Who from this roof is parted, shall return,
Advancing ever as I signal give,
To second each occasion thou shalt strive.

Ch. That, O my son, from of old
Hath been my care, to observe
What by thy glance hath been told ;
Still thy best uses to serve.
But where, O tell me, doth he
Inhabit, where doth he stay ?
This for my need thou must say,
Lest unawares I be ta'en,
Where doth he move or remain,
Ranging near home or away ?

Ne. Thou seest yon double doorway of his lair,
Poor habitation of the rock.

Ch. But where
Is he, poor hapless wight, himself abroad ?

Ne. To me 'tis clear that, in his quest for food,
Here, not far off, he trails this furrowed path.
For, as they tell, this way the sufferer hath
Of sustenance, O hardness ! bringing low
Wild creatures with wing'd arrows from his bow ;
Nor findeth healer for his troublous woe.

Ch. I feel his misery.
With no companion eye,

Far from all human care,
 He pines with fierce disease;
 Each want he hourly sees
 Waking a new despair.
 How can he bear it still?
 O human craft! O pain
 Of that sad mortal train
 Whose days with sorrows fill!
 He from some high-born hall,
 Noblest, perchance, of all,
 Lies lone and comfortless,
 A vision of distress,
 'Mongst rough and dappled brutes,
 With pangs and hunger worn;
 While from far distance shoots,
 On airy pinion borne,
 The unbridled Echo, still replying
 To his most bitter crying.

Ne. At nought of this I marvel. For if I
 Have sense, there lighted on him from on high
 That former pain through Chrysa's cruel sting:
 And if to-day he suffer anything
 With none to soothe, it must be from the will
 Of some great god, who careth to fulfil
 The word of prophecy, lest he should bend
 On Troy the shaft no valour may forefend,
 Before the arrival of Troy's destined hour,
 When she must fall, o'er-mastered by their power.

Ch. Hush, my son.

Ne. Why so?

Ch. A sound

Fostered of some mortal woe,

Started from the neighbouring ground.
 Here, or there? Ah! now I know.
 Hark, 'tis the voice of one in pain,
 Moving hardly, the deep strain,
 Of human anguish, all too clear,
 That strikes my heart, that wounds mine ear.
 From far it peals. But then, my son!

Ne. What?

Ch. Think again. He cometh nigh:
 He holds the region: not with tone
 Of piping shepherd's rural minstrelsy,
 But belloweth his far cry,
 Stumbling perchance with mortal pain,
 Or else in wild amaze,
 As he our ship surveys
 Unwonted on the inhospitable main.

Philoctetes. Ho!

What men are ye that to this desert shore,
 Harbourless, uninhabited, are come
 On shipboard? Of what country or what race
 Shall I pronounce ye? For your outward garb
 Is Grecian, ever dearest to this heart,
 That hungers now to hear your voices' tune.
 Ah! do not fear me, do not shrink away
 From my wild looks: but, pitying one so poor,
 Forlorn and desolate in nameless woe,
 Speak, if with friendly purpose ye are come.
 O answer! 'Tis not meet that I should lose
 This kindness from your lips, or ye from mine.

Ne. Then know this first, O stranger, as thou would'st,
 That we are Greeks.

Phil.

O dear, dear name. Ah me!

In all these years, once, only once, I hear it.
My son, what fairest gale hath wafted thee ?
What need hath brought thee to the shore ? What mission ?
Voice me all this, that I may know thee well.

Ne. The sea-girt Scyros is my native home.
Thitherward I make voyage. My father's name,
Achilles. I have frankly told thee all.

Phil. Dear is that shore to me, dear was thy father.
O ancient Lycomedes' foster-child,
Whence cam'st thou hither ? How didst thou set forth ?

Ne. Troy was the port we left with this convoy.

Phil. How ? Sure thou wast not with us, when at first
We launched our vessels on the Troyward course ?

Ne. Hadst thou a share in that adventurous toil ?

Phil. And know'st thou not whom thou behold'st in me,
My boy ?

Ne. How should I know him whom I ne'er
Set eye on ?

Phil. Hast not even heard my name,
Nor sounding rumour of my ruinous woe ?

Ne. Nay, I know nought of all thy questioning.

Phil. How full of sorrows, how abhorred of Heaven,
Am I, when of my state no faintest word
Hath reached my home, or any Grecian land !
But they, who pitilessly cast me forth,
Keep silence and are glad, while this my plague
Blooms ever, and is strengthened more and more.
Boy, great Achilles' offspring, in this form
Thou seest the man, of whom erewhile, methinks,
Thou hast been told, to whom the Hercúlean bow
Descended, Philoctetes, Pœas' son ;
Whom the two generals and the Ithacan king

Cast out thus shamefully forlorn, distressed
With the fierce malady and desperate wound
Caused by the cruel basilisk's murderous tooth.
With this for company they left me, boy,
Exposed upon this shore, deserted, lone.
From seaward Chrysa with my ships I had come
And touched at Lemnos: and had fallen to rest
From the long tossing, in a shadowy cave
On yonder cliff by the beach. Gladly they saw,
And left me, having set forth for my need,
Poor man! some scanty rags, and a thin store
Of provender. Such food be theirs, I pray.
Imagine, oh my son, when they were gone,
What wakening, what arising, then was mine,
What weeping, what lamenting of my woe!
When I beheld the ships, wherewith I sailed,
Gone, one and all! and no man in the place,
None to bestead me, none to comfort me
In my sore sickness. And where'er I looked,
Nought but distress was present with me still.
No lack of that, for one thing. Ah! my son,
Time after time slipped o'er me, still, alone,
Pinched in this narrow lodging, I must serve
Each pressing need. For body's sustenance,
This bow supplied me with sufficient store,
Wounding the feathered doves, and when the shaft,
From the tight string, had struck, myself, ay me!
Dragging this foot, would crawl to my swift prey.
Then water must be fetched, and in sharp frost
Wood must be found and broken, all by me.
Nor would fire come unbidden, but with flint
Striking the spark from flint, I hammered forth

The struggling flame that keeps the life in me.
For habitation, with the help of fire,
Gives all I need, save healing for my pain.
Now learn, my son, the nature of this 'isle.
No mariner puts in here willingly.
For it hath neither moorage, nor seaport,
Where one might traffic, or be entertained.
Not hitherwards do prudent men make voyage.
Perchance one may have touched against his will.
Such haps fall frequent in the vast of time.
These, when they come, in words have pitied me,
And given me food, or raiment, in compassion.
But none consenteth, when I speak of this,
To take me safely home. Wherefore I pine
Now this tenth year, in famine and distress,
Feeding the hunger of my ravenous plague.
Such works, my son, the Atridæ, and the might
Of wise Ulysses, have performed on me.
Wherefore may all the Olympian gods, one day,
Plague them with sharp requital for my wrong.

Ch. Methinks my feeling for thee, Pœas' child,
Is like that of thy former visitants.

Ne. I, too, a witness to confirm thy words,
Know them for verities, since I have found
The Atridæ and Ulysses evil men.

Phil. Art thou, too, wroth with the all-pestilent sons
Of Atreus? Have they given thee cause to grieve?

Ne. Would that my hand might ease the wrath I feel,
Then Sparta and Mycenæ should be ware
That Scyros too hath valiant sons for war.

Phil. Brave youth! I love thee. Tell me the great cause
Why thou inveighest against them with such heat?

Ne. O son of Pœas, hardly shall I tell
The outrage I endured when I had come,
Yet I will speak it. When the fate of death
O'ertook Achilles—

Phil. Out, alas ! no more !
Hold, till thou first hast made me clearly know,
Is Peleus' offspring dead ?

Ne. Alas ! he is,
Slain by no mortal, felled by Phœbus' shaft :
So men reported.

Phil. Well, right noble was he !
And noble his destroyer. Shall I mourn
Him first, or wait till I have heard thy tale ?

Ne. Enough of mourning thine own case, poor man,
Methinks, might give thee, without others' woe.

Phil. Well said. Renew thy speech then, and declare
Once more the act wherewith they insulted thee.

Ne. There came to fetch me, in a trim-rigged bark,
Ulysses and the fosterer of my sire,
Saying, whether soothly, or in idle show,
That, since my father perished, it was known,
None else but I should take Troy's citadel.
Such words from them, my friend, thou may'st believe,
Held me not long from making voyage with speed,
Chiefly through longing for my father's corse
To see him yet unburied, for I ne'er
Had seen him. Then, besides, 'twas a fair cause,
If, by my going, I might vanquish Troy.
One day I had sailed, and on the second came
To sad Sigéum with wind-favoured speed,
When straightway all the host, surrounding me
As I set foot on shore, saluted me,

And swore the dead Achilles was in life,
Their eyes being witness, when they looked on me.
He lay there in his shroud : but I, unhappy,
Soon ending lamentation for the dead,
Went near to the Atridæ, as to friends,
To ask my father's armour and all else
That had been his. And then, alas the while,
That men should be so hard ! they spake this word :
'Seed of Achilles, thou may'st freely take
All else thy father owned ; but for those arms,
Another wields them now, Laërtes' son.'
Tears rushed into mine eyes, and in deep wrath
I straightway rose, and bitterly outspake :
'O miscreant ! And have ye dared to give
Mine arms to some man else, without my word ?'
Then said Ulysses, for he chanced to be near,
'Yea, child, and justly have they given me these.
I saved them and their master in the field.'
Then in fierce anger all at once I launched
All terms of reprobation at his head,
Bating no word, as maddened by the thought
That I should lose this heirloom,—and to him !
He, at this pass, though not of wrathful mood,
Stung by such utterance, made rejoinder thus :
'Thou wast not with us here, but wrongfully
Didst bide afar. And, since thou mak'st so bold,
I tell thee, never shalt thou, as thou sayest,
Sail with these arms to Scyros.' Thus reviled,
With such an evil echo in mine ear,
I voyage homeward, rifled of mine own
By that vile offset of an evil tree.
Yet less I blame him, than the men in power.

For every city, and each host of men,
Is wholly in the hand of those that rule,
And all disorder from ill guidance springs.
I have spoken. May the Atridæ's enemy
Be dear to Heaven, as he is loved by me.

Ch. Mother of mightiest Jove,
Feeder of all that live,
Who from thy mountain breast
Rivers of gold dost give!
To thee, O Earth, I cried that shameful day,
When insolence from Atreus' sons went forth
Full on our lord: when they bestowed away
His father's arms to crown Ulysses' worth;
O thou whom bull-fed lions yokèd bear,
Great mother, hear!

Phil. With a clear title, strangers, in your grief
Ye crossed the ocean to my cave. I feel
A chord that vibrates to your voice, and tells,
Thus have Ulysses and the Atridæ wrought.
For well I know, Ulysses' poisoned tongue
Avoids no mischief nor no cozening word,
That leads to wrong achievement in the end.
This moveth not my marvel, but if one
Saw this and bore it, Ajax the elder-born.

Ne. Ah, stranger, he was gone. Had he but lived,
This robber trick had ne'er been passed on me.

Phil. What? Is he too departed?

Ne.

He is dead.

This light no more beholds him.

Phil.

Oh! alas!

But Tydeus' offspring, and the rascal birth

Laërtes bought of Sisyphus, they live :

I know it. For their death were to be wished.

Ne. Yea, be assured, they live and flourish high,
Exalted in the host of Argive men.

Phil. And Nestor, my old friend, good aged man,
Is he yet living ? Oft he would prevent
Their evils, by the wisdom of his thought.

Ne. He too is now in trouble, having lost
Antilochus, the son he had at Troy.

Phil. Alas ! In one brief word thou hast revealed
The mournful case of two, whom I would least
Have chosen to hear of as undone. Ah me !
Where must one look ? when these are dead, and he,
Ulysses, liveth, and in such a time,
That craves their presence, and his death for theirs.

Ne. He wrestles cleverly ; but, O my friend,
Even clever wits are oftentimes snared at last.

Phil. I prithee tell, where, in yon state, was he,
Patroclus, whom thy father loved so well ?

Ne. He too was gone. I'll tell thee in a word
One truth for all. War doth not willingly
Snatch off the wicked, but still takes the good.

Phil. True, and accordingly I will inquire
The fate of a poor dastard, of mean worth,
But ever shrewd and nimble with his tongue.

Ne. Whom but Ulysses canst thou mean by this ?

Phil. I meant not him. But there was one Thersites,
Who ne'er made conscience to stint speech, where all
Cried ' whisht ! ' Is he yet living ? Dost thou know ?

Ne. I saw him not, but knew he was alive.

Phil. He must be : for no evil yet was crushed.
The Heavens will ever shield it. 'Tis their sport
To turn back all things rancorous and malign

From going to the grave, and send instead
The equitable and good. How shall we praise
Such acts, how construe them? When I extol
Things god-like, I find evil in the gods.

Ne. I, O thou child of a Trachinian sire,
Mean henceforth so to guard me, as from far
To look on Troy and the Atrides pair.
And, where the worse hath power above the just,
And goodness languisheth, and cowards rule,
Such courses I will nevermore endure.
But rock-bound Scyros henceforth shall suffice
To yield me all contentment in my home.
Now, to my vessel. And thou, Pœas' child,
Farewell, most heartily farewell! May Heaven
Grant thy desire, and rid thee of thy plague!
Let us be going, that when God shall give
Fair voyage, that moment we may launch away.

Phil. My son, are ye now setting forth?

Ne.

Our time

Bids us go near and look to sail erelong.

Phil. Now by thy father, by thy mother, boy,
By all thy love e'er cherished in thy home,
Suppliant I beg thee, leave me not thus lone
Forlorn in all my misery which thou seest,
In all thou hast heard of here surrounding me.
But take me by the way. Such freight, I know,
Is full of trouble and vexatious care.
Yet venture. Surely to the noble mind
Baseness is hateful and all kindness blest.
And base reproach were thine in failing here,
But doing this, the fairest of renown,
Should I return alive to Cœta's vale.

Come, 'tis the labour not of one whole day.
So thou durst take me, cast me where thou wilt
O' the ship, in hold, prow, stern, or wheresoe'er
I may least trouble those on board with me.
Ah! by great Jove, the suppliant's friend, comply,
My son, be softened! See, where I am fall'n
Thus on my knees before thee, though so weak,
Crippled and powerless. Ah! forsake me not
Thus far from human footstep. Take me, take me!
If only to thine home, or to the stalls
Of wild Chalcódon in Eubœa. From thence
I have not far to Cæta, and the ridge
Of Trachis and Spercheius flowing mild.
So thou shalt bless my father with my sight.
Though 'tis long time since I have feared him gone.
For oft I sent him suppliant prayers by men
Who touched this isle, entreating him to fetch
And bear me safely home with his own crew.
But either he is dead, or else, methinks,
It well may be, my messengers made light
Of my concerns, and hastened onward home.
But now in thee I find both messenger
And convoy, thou wilt pity me and save.
For, well thou knowest, danger never sleeps,
And fear of sad reverse is always nigh.
Mortals, when free, should look where danger lurks,
And in their happiest hour consider well
Their life, lest ruin unsuspected come.

Ch. Pity him, O my king!

Many a hard-borne woe
He telleth, such as I pray
None of my friends may know.

And if, dear master, thou mislikest sore
Yon cruel-hearted lordly pair, I would,
Turning their destined evil to his good,
On swift ship bear him to his native shore,
Easing his heart, and flying the fell scath
Of the heavenly wrath.

Ne. Thou mak'st small scruple here: but be advised:
Lest, when this plague on board shall weary thee,
Thy voice should alter from this early tune.

Ch. No, truly. Fear not thou shalt ever have
Just cause to utter this reproach on me.

Ne. Then sure 'twere shame if I should tardier prove
Than thou, to labour for the stranger's need.
Come, if you will, let us make voyage, and he,
Let him set forth with speed. Our ship shall take him.
He shall not be refused. Only may Heaven
Lead safely hence and to our destined port!

Phil. O morning full of brightness! Kindest friend,
Sweet mariners, how can I make you feel,
In act, how dearly from my heart I love you!
Ye have won my soul. Let us be gone, my son,
First having said farewell to this poor cave,
My homeless dwelling-place, that thou may'st know,
How barely I have lived, how firm my heart.
Methinks another could not have endured
The very sight of what I bore. But I
Through strong necessity have conquered pain.

Ch. Stay: let us understand. There come two men,
A stranger, with a shipmate of thy crew.
When ye have heard them, ye may then go in.

Merchantman. Son of Achilles, my companion here,
Who with two fellows was thy vessel's guard,

Agreed to show me where thou wert, since I
Most unexpectedly, through fortune's will,
Have met thee, mooring by the selfsame shore.
For like a merchantman, with no great sail,
Making my course from Ilion to my home,
Grape-clustered Peparethos, when I heard
The mariners declare that one and all
Were of thy crew, I chose not to launch forth
Without a word, till we had told our news.
Methinks thou knowest nought of thine own case,
What new devices of the Grecian chiefs
Surround thee; nor devices only now,
But active deeds no longer unperformed.

Ne. Well, stranger, for the kindness thou hast shown,
Else were I base, my heart must thank thee still.
But tell me what thou meanest, that I may learn
What fresh device thou bring'st me from the camp.

Mer. Old Phœnix and the sons of Theseüs
Are gone in thy pursuit with ships and men.

Ne. To bring me back with reasons or perforce?

Mer. I know not. What I heard, I am here to tell.

Ne. How? And is this in act? Are they set forth
To please the Atridæ, Phœnix and his band?

Mer. The thing is not to do, but doing now.

Ne. What kept Ulysses back, if this be so,
From going himself? Had he some cause for fear?

Mer. He and the son of Tydeus, when our ship
Hove sail, were starting for another man.

Ne. For whom could he himself be voyaging?

Mer. For one—but tell me first, and whisper low
Whate'er thou speakest,—who is this I see?

Ne. This, sir, is Philoctetes the renowned.

Mer. Without more question, snatch thyself away
And sail forth from this land.

Phil. What saith he, boy ?

Through what dark traffic is the mariner
Betraying me with whispering in thine ear ?

Ne. I have not caught it, but whate'er he speak,
The light must have it, we and these men must hear.

Mer. Seed of Achilles, let me not offend
The host in word : full many a boon from them,
As a poor man, I reap for service done.

Ne. The Atridæ are my foes ; the man you see
Is my fast friend, because he hates th' Atridæ.
Then, if you come as friendly, you must hide
No word of all you know from him and me.

Mer. See what thou doest, my son !

Ne. I see it well.

Mer. Thou shalt be answerable.

Ne. Content : but speak.

Mer. Then hear me. These two men whom I have named,
Diomedes and Ulysses, are set forth
Engaged on oath to bring this man, by force,
If reasons fail. The Achæans every one
Have heard this plainly from Ulysses' mouth.
He was the louder and more confident.

Ne. Say, for what cause, after so long a time,
Should Atreus' sons have turned their thoughts on him,
Whom all this while they had cast forth ? What touch
Of longing moved them, or what push from Heaven,
Whose wrath requiteth all ill deeds of men ?

Mer. Methinks thou hast not heard what I will now
Unfold to thee. There was a princely seer,
A son of Priam, Helenus by name,

Whom he that never mischief yet escaped,
Crafty Ulysses, sallying forth alone
One night, had taken and in bonds displayed
'Fore all the Achæans, a right noble prey.
He, 'midst his other prophecies, foretold,
No Greek should ever sack Troy's citadel,
Till with fair reasons they had brought this man
From off this isle, his lonely dwelling-place.
When thus the prophet spake, Laërtes' son
Straight undertook to bring him and set forth
In the mid camp: he trusted, by consent:
But else, perforce. And, if he failed in this,
Whoever would might smite him in the face.
My tale is told, dear youth. I counsel speed
To thee and to the man for whom thou carest.

Phil. Ah me, unhappy! has that rascal knave
Sworn to fetch me with reasons to their camp?
As likely might his reasons bring me back,
Like his begetter, from the house of death.

Mer. You talk of what I know not. I will go
Shipwards. May God be with you for all good.

Phil. Is not this terrible, Laërtes' son
Should ever think to bring me with soft words
And show me on his deck to all the host?
No! Sooner will I listen to the tongue
Of the curs'd basilisk that thus hath maim'd me.
Ay, but he'll venture anything in word
Or deed. And now I know he will be here.
Come, O my son, let us be gone, while seas
And winds divide us from Ulysses' ship.
Let us depart. Sure timely haste brings rest
And quiet slumber when the toil is done.

Alone of mortals for thine excellence
 To have held this in thy touch. I too, at first,
 Received it as a boon for kindness done.
 I grudge thee not, since I obtained and saw
 Thy friendship. More than any wealth is he
 Whose heart requites such kindness as I give.

Ne. Well, go within.

Phil. Nay, I must take thee too.
 My sickness craves thee for its comforter.

Ch. In fable I have heard,
 Though sight hath ne'er confirmed the word,
 That he, who once came near the couch of Jove,
 Was cast by the all-father on a wheel,

Tied head and heel,
 Still bound,
 Ever around
 To move.

None else I have known by hearsay nor by sight,
 Whose hateful plight
 Could be compared with his I see.
 O depth of misery !

In one who did no theft or violent deed,
 But rather earned the meed
 Of justice, had he dwelt amongst the just,
 Who now is thrust

Away in solitude to hear the billows roar,
 That break around the shore.

How could a life so sad remain in light ?
 Where neighbour there was none,
 Saving himself alone,

No hand to stay his faltering steps and sore,
 No echo to his moan

From hearts to whom his pangs he might deplore.
None, who whene'er the bloody flow
Had seized him, and the issue from his wound
Was rushing hot, might healing herbs bestow,
Or pluck them from the grassy ground,
To soothe the sharpness of his hideous woe.
Like infant whom the nurse lets go,
With tottering footsteps here and there
He crawled for comfort, whensoe'er
His soul-consuming torment left him free :
Not fed on produce of boon Earth, which we
Find to sustain us, ever-toiling men,
But only now and then
With wingèd things, by his wing'd shafts brought
low,
He stayed his hunger from his bow.
Poor soul, that never once in ten years' space
Brightened his face
With the fruit of the vine,
But ever seeking to some standing pool,
Nor clear nor cool,
Drank it for wine.
But now, consorted with the hero's child,
He winneth greatness and a joyful change
From that low state : over the water wild
Borne by the friendly bark beneath the range
Of Ceta, where Spercheius fills
Calm basins between lovely hills,
Haunted of Melian nymphs, till he espies
The roof-tree of his father's hall,
And high o'er all
Towers that majestic form, whose home is in the skies.

Ne. Prithee, come on. Why dost thou stand aghast,
Voiceless, and thus astonied in thine air?

Phil. Oh! oh!

Ne. What?

Phil. Nothing. Come, my son. Fear
nought.

Ne. Is pain upon thee? Has thy trouble come?

Phil. No pain, no pain! 'Tis past; I am easy now.
Ye heavenly powers!

Ne. Why dost thou groan aloud,
And cry to Heaven?

Phil. To come and save. Kind Heaven!
Oh, oh!

Ne. What is't? Why silent? Wilt not speak?
I see thy misery.

Phil. Oh! I am lost, my son!
I cannot hide it from you. Oh! it shoots,
It pierces. Oh unhappy! Oh! my woe!
I am lost, my son, I am devoured. Oh me!
O! O! O! O! Pain, pain! Oh pain! oh pain!
Child, if a sword be to thine hand, smite hard,
Shear off my foot, heed not my life. Quick, come!

Ne. What hath so suddenly arisen, that thus
Thou makest ado and groanest o'er thyself?

Phil. Thou knowest.

Ne. What know I?

Phil. O! thou knowest, my son!

Ne. I know not.

Phil. How? Not know? Oh me! Pain, pain

Ne. Thy plague is a sore burden, heavy and sore.

Phil. Sore? 'Tis unutterable. Have pity on me!

Ne. What shall I do?

Phil. Do not in fear forsake me.
This wandering evil comes in force again,
Hungry as ere it fed.

Ne. O hapless one!
Thrice-hapless in thy manifold distress.
What wilt thou? Shall I raise thee on mine arm?

Phil. Nay, but receiving from my hand this bow,
As late thou didst desire me, keep it safe
And guard it, till this fury of my pain
Pass over me and cease. For when 'tis spent,
Slumber will seize me, else it ne'er would end.
I must sleep undisturbed: but if meanwhile
They come,—by Heaven I charge thee, in no wise,
Willingly nor perforce, let them have this.
Else thou wilt be the slayer of us both,
Of me thy suppliant, and of thyself.

Ne. Fear not my care. No hand shall hold these arms
But thine and mine. Give, and Heaven bless the deed.

Phil. I give them; there, my son! But look to Heaven
And pray no envy smite thee, nor such bane
In having them, as fell on me and him
Who bore them formerly.

Ne. O grant it, gods!
And grant us fair and happy voyage, where'er
Our course is shaped and righteous Heaven shall guide.

Phil. Ah! but I fear, my son, thy prayer is vain,
For welling yet again from depths within
This gory ooze is dripping. It will come!
I know it will. Oh, foot, torn helpless thing,
What wilt thou do to me? Ah! ah! It comes,
It is at hand. 'Tis here! Woe's me, undone!
I have shown you all. Stay near me. Go not far,

Ugh !

O island king, I would this agony
Might wring thy bosom through and through ! Woe, woe,
Woe ! ah ! ye two commanders of the host,
Agamemnon, Menelaus, oh that ye,
Another ten years' durance in my room,
Might nurse this malady. O death, death, death,
I call thee daily : wilt thou never come ?
Will it not be ? My son, thou noble boy,
If thou art noble, take and burn me there
Aloft in yonder worshipped Lemnian fire.
Yea, when that bow was my reward, I once
Shrank not from serving thus the son of Jove.
How now, my son ?

What say'st ? Art silent ? Where—where art thou, boy ?

Ne. My heart is full, and groaning o'er thy woes.

Phil. But yet have comfort. This affliction oft
Goes no less swiftly than it came. I pray thee,
Stand fast and leave me not alone.

Ne.

Fear nought :

We will not stir.

Phil. Wilt thou remain ?

Ne.

Be sure of it.

Phil. I'll not degrade thee with an oath, my son.

Ne. Rest satisfied. I may not go without thee.

Phil. Thine hand, to pledge me that !

Ne.

There, I will stay.

Phil. Now, now, aloft !

Ne.

Where meanest thou ?

Phil.

Yonder aloft !

Ne. Whither ? Thou rav'st. Why starest thou at the sky ?

Phil. Now, let me go.

Ne. Where ?

Phil. Let me go, I say !

Ne. I will not.

Phil. You will kill me. Let me go !

Ne. Well, thou know'st best. I hold thee not.

Phil. O Earth,

I die : receive me to thy breast. This pain
Subdues me utterly ; I cannot stand.

Ne. Methinks he will be fast in slumber soon.
This head sinks backward, and a clammy sweat
Bathes all his limbs, while from his foot hath burst
A vein, dark-bleeding. Let us leave him, friends,
In quietness, till he hath fallen to sleep.

Ch. Lord of the happiest life,
Sleep, thou that know'st not strife,
That know'st not grief,
Still wafting sure relief,
Come, saviour, now.
Thy healing light is spread
Over this pain-worn head ;
Loose not the band that gives calm to his brow.
Look, O my lord, to thy path,
Either to go or to stay :
How is my thought to proceed ?
What is our cause for delay ?
Look. Opportunity's power,
Fitting the task to the hour,
Giveth the race to the swift.

Ne. He hears not. But I see that to have ta'en
His bow without him were a bootless gain.
He must sail with us. So the god hath said.
Heaven hath decreed this garland for his head :

And to have failed with falsehood were a meed
Of shameful soilure for a shameless deed.

Ch. God shall determine the end,
But for thine answer, friend,

Waft soft words low.

All sick men's sleep, we know,

Hath open eye,

Their ever-wakeful mind

Trembleth in lightest wind,

Sleepless in slumber new danger to spy.

Think, O my lord, of thy path,

Secretly look forth afar,

What wilt thou do for thy need?

How with the wise wilt thou care?

If toward the nameless thy heart

Chooseth this merciful part,

Huge are the dangers that drift.

The wind is fair, my son, the wind is fair.

The man is dark and helpless, stretched in night.

(O kind warm sleep that calmest human care!)

Powerless of hand and foot and ear and sight,

Blind, as one lying in the house of death:

(Think well if here thou utterest timely breath).

This, O my son, is all my thought can find,

Best are the toils that without frightening bind.

Ne. Hush! One word more were madness. He revives.
His eye hath motion. He uplifts his head.

Phil. O lightening after sleep, and ye, dear friends,
Faithful beyond all hope in watching me!

I never could have dreamed that thou, dear boy,

Could'st thus have borne my sufferings and stood near

So full of pity to relieve my pain.

Not so the worthy generals of the host,
 This princely patience was not theirs to show.
 Only thy noble nature, nobly sprung,
 Made light of all the trouble, though oppressed
 With fetid odours and unceasing cries.
 And now, since this my woe would seem to give
 Some pause and brief forgetfulness of pain,
 With thine own hand, my son, upraise me here,
 And set me on my feet, that, when my strength
 After exhaustion shall return again,
 We may move shipwards and launch forth with speed.

Ne. I feel unhop'd for gladness when I see
 Thy painless gaze, and hear thy living breath,
 For thine appearance and surroundings both
 Were deathlike. But arise! Or, if thou wilt,
 These men shall raise thee. For they will not shrink
 From tasks which thou and I together will.

Phil. Right, right, my son! But lift me thine own self,
 As I am sure thou meanest. Let these be.
 Lest they be burdened with the noisome smell
 Too soon. Enough for them the toil on board
 Of living near me.

Ne. Well, stand up, endure!

Phil. Fear not. Old habit will support me soon.

Ne. Oh me!

What shall I do? Now 'tis my turn to cry.

Phil. What can the matter be? What change is here,
 My son?

Ne. I know not how to shift the word.

'Tis hopeless.

Phil. What is hopeless? Speak not so,
 Dear child!

Ne. But so my wretched lot hath fallen.

Phil. Ah! Can it be, the offence of my disease
Hath moved thee not to take me now on board?

Ne. All is offence to one who hath forced himself
To do things unbecoming to his life.

Phil. Nought misbecoming to thyself or sire
Dost thou or speak'st, befriending a good man.

Ne. My baseness will appear. O lingering pain!

Phil. Not in thy deeds. But for thy words, I fear me!

Ne. O Heaven! Must double vileness then be mine,
Both shameful silence and most shameful speech?

Phil. Or my discernment is at fault, or thou
Mean'st to betray me and make voyage without me.

Ne. Nay, not without thee, there is my distress!
Lest I convey thee to thy bitter pain.

Phil. What, what? my child. I do not understand.

Ne. Here I unveil it. Thou art to sail to Troy,
To join the chieftains and the Achæan host.

Phil. What do I hear? Oh!

Ne. Grieve not till you learn.

Phil. Learn what? What wilt thou make of me? What
meanest?

Ne. First to release thee from this plague, and then
With thee to go and take the plains of Troy.

Phil. And is this thine intent?

Ne. 'Tis so ordained
Unchangeably. Be not distressed. 'Tis so.

Phil. Me miserable! I am betrayed, destroyed!
What hast thou done? My bow! give back! My
bow!

Ne. I may not. Interest, and duty too,
Cause me to listen to our masters.

Phil.

Oh!

Thou fire, thou terror of the world, thou thrice
Abhorred piece of cunning villany!
How hast thou wronged me! How hast thou deceived me!
And art thou not ashamed to look on me,
O cruel heart! that turned to thee for shelter?
Thou hast ta'en my life away with yonder bow.
Ah! give it back, my son, I pray thee, give!
By all thy father worshipped, rob me not
Of life. Ah me! Now he will speak no more,
But turns away, obdurate to retain it.
O ye, my comrades in this wilderness,
Rude creatures of the rocks, O promontories,
Creeks, precipices of the hills, to you
And your familiar presence I complain
Of this dark deed of great Achilles' son.
Sworn to convey me home, to Troy he bears me.
And under pledge of his right hand hath ta'en
And holds from me perforce my wondrous bow,
The sacred gift of Jove-born Hercules,
Thinking to air it mid'st the Achæan host
For his. As having vanquished some strong man,
He carries me away, and knoweth not
He is spoiling a mere corse, an empty dream,
The shadow of a vapour. In my strength
He ne'er had conquered me. Even as I am,
He could not, but by guile. Now, all unhappy,
I am abused, deceived. What must I do?
Nay, give it me. Nay, yet be thy true self.
Thou art silent. I am lost. O misery!
Rude face of rock, back I return to thee
And thy twin gateway, robbed of arms and food,

To wither in thy cave companionless ;
 No more with these mine arrows to destroy
 Or flying bird or mountain-roving beast.
 But, O unhappy, I myself must be
 The feast of those on whom I fed, the chase
 Of that I hunted, and shall dearly pay
 In bloody quittance for their death, by one
 Who seemed all ignorant of sinful guile.
 Perish,—not till I am certain if thine heart
 Will change once more,—if not, my curse on thee !

Ch. What shall we do, my lord ? It rests with thee
 Or to sail now, or yield to his desire.

Ne. My heart is pressed with a strange pity for
 him,

Not now beginning, but continued long.

Phil. Ay, pity me, my son ! by all above,
 Make not thy name a scorn by cheating me.

Ne. O ! I am troubled sore. What must I do ?
 Would I had never left mine island home !

Phil. Thou art not base, but, as 'twould seem, art
 here

Taught baseness by base men. Now, as 'tis meet,
 Be better guided—leave me mine arms, and go.

Ne. What shall we do ?

Ulysses. What art thou doing, knave ?
 Give me that bow, and haste back to the ship.

Phil. Alas ! What do I hear ? Ulysses' voice ?

Ul. Be sure of that. Ulysses', whom thou seest.

Phil. Oh, I am bought and sold, undone ! 'Twas he,
 That kidnapped me and robbed me of my bow.

Ul. Yea. I deny it not. Be sure, 'twas I.

Phil. Give back, my son, the bow, release it !

Ul.

This,

Though he desire it, he shall never do.

Thou too shalt march along, or these shall force thee.

Phil. They force me! O thou boldest of bad men!
They force me?

Ul. - If thou comest not willingly.

Phil. O Lemnian earth and thou almighty flame,
Hephaestus' workmanship, shall this be borne,
That he by force must drag me from your care?

Ul. 'Tis Zeus, I tell thee, monarch of this isle,
Who thus hath willed. I am his minister.

Phil. Wretch, what vile words thy wit hath power to say
The gods are liars when thou hold'st them forth.

Ul. Nay, 'tis their truth compels thee to this road.

Phil. I will not have it so.

Ul. I will. You must.

Phil. Woe for my wretchedness! My father, then,
Begot no freeman, but a slave in me.

Ul. Nay, but the peer of noblest men, with whom
Thou art to take and ravage Troy with might.

Phil. Never,—though I must suffer direst woe,—
While this steep Lemnian ground is mine to tread.

Ul. What now is thine intent?

Phil. Down from the crag
This head shall plunge and stain the crag beneath.

Ul. Ay, seize and bind him. Baffle him in this.

Phil. Poor hands, for lack of your beloved string,
Caught by this craven! O corrupted soul!
How thou hast undermined me, having ta'en
To screen thy chase this youth to me unknown,
Far worthier of my friendship than of thine,
Who knew no better than to obey command.

Even now 'tis manifest he burns within
With pain for his own error and my wrong.
But, though unwilling and inapt for ill,
Thy crafty, mean, and cranny-spying soul
Hath nobly lessoned him in sinful lore.
Now thou hast bound me, O thou wretch, and thinkest
To take me from this coast, where thou did'st cast
me.

Outlawed and desolate, a corpse 'mongst men.
Oh !

I curse thee now, as oft-times in the past :
But since Heaven yields me nought but bitterness,
Thou livest and art blithe, while 'tis my pain
To live on in my misery, bemocked
By thee and Atreus' sons, those generals twain
Whom thou art serving in this quest. But thou
With strong compulsion and deceit wast driven
Troyward, while I, poor victim, of freewill
Took my seven ships and sailed there, yet was thrown
Far from all honour, as thou sayest, by them,
But, as they turn the tale, by thee. And now
Why take me hence and fetch me ? To what end ?
I am nothing, dead to you this many a year.
How, O thou Heaven-aborred ! am I not now
Lame and of evil smell ? how shall ye vaunt
Before the gods drink-offering or the fat
Of victims, if I sail amongst your crew ?
For this, as ye professed, was the chief cause
Why ye disowned me. Perish ! So ye shall,
For the wrong done me, if the Heavens be just.
And that they are, I know. Else had ye ne'er
Launched on this mission for an outcast wretch,

Did they not wring your breast with thoughts of me.
 Oh, if ye pity me, chastising powers,
 And thou, the genius of my land, revenge,
 Revenge this crime on all their heads at once !
 My life is pitiable ; but if I saw
 Their ruin, I would think me well and strong.

Ch. How full of bitterness is his resolve,
 Sullenly spoken with unbending will !

Ul. I might speak long in answer, did the time
 Give scope, but now one thing is mine to say.
 I am known to vary with the varying need ;
 And when 'tis tried, who can be just and good,
 My peer will not be found for piety.
 But though on all occasions covetous
 Of victory, this once I yield to thee,
 And willingly. Unhand him there. Let go.
 Leave him to stay. What further need of thee,
 When we have ta'en these arms ? Have we not
 Teucer,

Skilled in this mystery ? Yea, I may boast
 Myself thine equal both in strength and aim
 To master this. Then fare thee well. Thou art free
 To roam thy barren isle. We need thee not.
 Let us be going. And perchance thy bow
 May bring thy destined glory to my brow.

Phil. What shall I do ? Alas, shalt thou be seen
 Graced with mine arms amongst the Achæan host ?

Ul. No more ! I am going.

Phil. O Achilles' child !

Wilt thou, too, vanish ? Must I lose thy voice ?

Ul. Go on and look not, noble as thou art,
 Lest thou undo our fortune.

No more with living mortal may I dwell,
But ever pining in this desert cell,
Most wofully, all famished must remain
And perish, for what food is mine to share,
When this strong arm no longer wields my bow,
Whose wing'd shafts flew to smite the birds of air?
I was o'erthrown by words, words dark and blind,
Low-creeping from a traitorous mind.
O might I see him, whose unrighteous thought

This ruin wrought,

Plagued for no less a period with like woe!

Ch. I cannot find

That thou wast caught by craft of mine,

But destiny divine

Hath thus o'erta'en thee. Turn away
Thy dreadful curse from us, we pray,
To other objects. I, too, care for this,
Return from thee our kindness may not miss.

Phil. Now, seated by the shore

Of heaving ocean hoar,

He mocks me, waving high

Yon sustenance of my distressful being,

The bow which none e'er held but I.

O treasure of my heart, torn from this hand,

That loved thy touch,—if thou canst understand,

How sad must be thy look in seeing

Thy master destined now no more,

Like Hercules of yore,

To wield thee with an archer's might:

But in the grasp of an all-scheming wight,

O bitter change! thou art plied;

And shaken ever at his side,

Shall view his life of dark malignity,
And teeming guileful shames, such as he wrought on
me.

Ch. Nobly to speak for the right
Becometh a man,
But not with an envious blight
To envenom his ban ;
And he, as the host had decreed,
One for many, in truth,
Gave help to his nation at need
By instructing the youth.

Phil. Come, legions of the wild,
Fowl from the fields of air,
And beasts, that know not care,
Of aspect fierce or mild,
That walk these savage ways
With bright untroubled gaze,
Come near my cave and stay :
Why should ye flee away ?
The might I had, alas ! is no more mine,
Stolen with those arms divine.
This fortress hath but feeble guard,
No longer to be fear'd.
Now is your time to swarm
And glut your vengeance on these tainted limbs,
Quivering and warm.
Already death bedims
My fainting sense. Who can thus live on air,
Tasting no gift of earth that breathing mortals
share ?

Ch. Ah ! do not shrink from thy friend,
If friend thou reverest,

But know, 'tis for thee to forefend
The fate which thou fearest.
The lot, which thou hast to deplore,
 'Tis sad to maintain,
And hardship in sickness is sore,
 But sorest in pain.

Phil. Kindest of all that e'er before
 Have trod this shore,
Again thou mind'st me of mine ancient groan.
Why wilt thou ruin me? What hast thou
 done?

Ch. What mean'st thou?

Phil. If to Troy, of me abhorred,
Thou e'er hast-hoped to lead me with thy lord.

Ch. So I judge best.

Phil. Begone at once, begone!

Ch. Sweet is that word, and swiftly shall be done!
Let us begone, each to his place on board.

Phil. Nay, by dear Zeus, to whom we suppliants moan,
Leave me not yet.

Ch. Keep measure in thy word.

Phil. Stay, by Heaven, stay!

Ch. What wilt thou say?

Phil. O misery! O cruel power
That rul'st this hour!

I am destroyed. Ah me!
O poor torn limb, what shall I do with thee
Through all my days to be?
Ah, strangers, come, return, return!

Ch. What new command are we to learn
Crossing thy former mind?

Phil. Ah! yet be kind.

Reprove not him, whose tongue, with grief distraught,
Obeys not, in dark storms, the helm of thought.

Ch. Come, poor friend, the way we call.

Phil. Never, know it once for all.
Not though he, whom Heaven obeys,
Singe me with fierce lightning's blaze.
Perish Troy, and all your host,
That have chosen, to their cost,
To despise and cast me forth,
Since my plague obscured my worth.
Ah, but, strangers, if your sense
Hath o'ermastered this offence,
Give me one thing that I pray.

Ch. What is this ?

Phil. A sword to-day,
Or some axe or warlike dart,
Bring it to content my heart.

Ch. What is thy new intent ?

Phil. To sever point by point
This body, joint from joint.
On bloody death my mind is bent.

Ch. Wherefore ?

Phil. To see my father's face.

Ch. Where upon Earth ?

Phil. He hath no place
Where sun doth shine, but in the halls of Night.
O native country, land of my delight,
Would I were blest one moment with thy sight !
Why did I leave thy sacred dew
And loose my vessels from thy shore,
To join the hateful Danaän crew
And lend them succour ? Oh, I am no more !

Ch. Long since thou hadst seen me nearing yonder ship,
Had I not spied Ulysses and the son
Of great Achilles hastening to our side.

Ul. Wilt thou not tell me why thou art hurrying
This backward pathway with reverted speed ?

Ne. To undo what I have wrongly done to-day.

Ul. Your words appal me. What is wrongly done ?

Ne. Obeying thee and all the Achæan host—

Ul. Thou didst what deed that misbecame thy life ?

Ne. I conquered with base stratagem and fraud—

Ul. Whom ? What new plan is rising in thine heart ?

Ne. Not new. But to the child of Pœas here—

Ul. What wilt thou do ? I shake with strange alarm.

Ne. From whom I took these weapons, back again—

Ul. O Heaven ! thou wilt not give them ! Mean'st thou
this ?

Ne. Yea, for I have them through base sinful means.

Ul. I pray thee, speak'st thou thus to anger me ?

Ne. If the truth anger thee, the truth is said.

Ul. How ? Our chief's son ! What word hast thou
disclosed ?

Ne. Must the same syllables be thrice thrown forth ?

Ul. Once was too much. Would they might rest unsaid !

Ne. Enough. Thou hast heard my counsel clearly told.

Ul. I know what power shall balk thee in the deed.

Ne. Whose hand shall hinder me ?

Ul. The Achæan host,

And I amongst them.

Ne. Thou'rt sharp-witted, sure,

But little wit or wisdom show'st thou here.

Ul. Neither thy words nor thy design is wise.

Ne. But if 'tis righteous, that is better far.

Ul. How, righteous, to release what thou hast ta'en
By my device ?

Ne. I sinned a shameful sin,
And I will do mine utmost to retrieve it.

Ul. How ? Fear'st not the Achæans in this act ?

Ne. In doing right I reck not of thy fear.

Ul. I call thy power in question.

Ne. Then I'll fight,
Not with Troy's legions, but with thee.

Ul. Come on.
Let fortune arbitrate.

Ne. Thou seest mine hand
Feeling the hilt.

Ul. And me thou soon shalt see
Doing the like, and dallying not. And yet
I will not touch thee, but will go and tell
The army, that shall 'venge this on thy head.

Ne. Thou show'st discretion : which if thou pre-
servest

Hereafter, thou may'st walk exempt from pain.
Ho ! son of Pœas, Philoctetes hight,
Pass thy rude gateway, and step forth to light.

Phil. What noise again is troubling my poor cave ?
Why do ye summon me ? What crave ye, sirs ?
Ha ! 'tis some knavery. Are ye come to bring
Some monster evil to my mountainous woe ?

Ne. Fear not, but hearken to my present word.

Phil. I needs must fear thee, whose fair words erewhile
Drew me to bitter fortune.

Ne. May not men
Repent and change ?

Phil. Such wast thou in thy talk,

When thou didst filch my bow, all candour outward,
All hidden bale within.

Ne. Ah, but not now
Assure thee! Only let me hear thy will,
Is't constant to remain here and endure,
Or to make voyage with us?

Phil. Stop, speak no more,
Idle and vain will all thine utterance be.

Ne. Thou art so resolved?

Phil. More firmly than I say.

Ne. I would I might have brought to my mind,
But since my words are out of tune, I have done.

Phil. Thou'rt best. No word of thine can touch my soul
Or win me to thy love, who by deceit
Hast reft my life away. And then thou com'st
To school me,—of noblest father, basest son!
Perish, the Atridæ first of all, and then
Laërtes' child, and thou!

Ne. Curse me no more,
But take this bow I give thee from mine hand.

Phil. What word is this? Am I again deceived?

Ne. No, by the all-worshipped name of purest Jove.

Phil. O voice of gladness, if thy words be true!

Ne. The deed shall prove them. Only reach thine hand,
And be again sole master of thy bow.

Ul. But I make protest, in the sight of Heaven,
For Atreus' sons and all the Achæan host.

Phil. Dear son, whose voice disturbs us? Do I hear
Ulysses?

Ul. Yea, and thou behold'st him nigh,
And he shall force thee to the Trojan plain,
Howe'er Achilles' offspring make or mar.

Phil. This shaft shall bear thee sorrow for that boast.

Ne. Let it not fly, by Heaven !

Phil. Dear child, let free
Mine arm !

Ne. I will not.

Phil. Ah ! Why hast thou robbed
My bow of bringing down mine enemy ?

Ne. This were not noble or for me or thee.

Phil. One thing is manifest, the first o' the host,
Lying forerunners of the Achæan band,
Are brave with words, but cowards with the steel.

Ne. Well, now the bow is thine. Hast thou still cause
Of anger or resentment against me ?

Phil. None. Thou hast proved thy birthright, dearest boy.
Not from the loins of Sisyphus thou camest,
But from Achilles, who in life was held
Noblest of men alive, and now o' the dead.

Ne. It gladdens me to hear thee bless my sire
And me. But listen, till I show thee once
The boon for which I sue thee. Mortal men
Must bear such evils as high Heaven ordains.
But those whom voluntary woe surrounds,
Which thou now sufferest, justice will not yield
To them or kind indulgence or compassion.
And thou art restive grown, and wilt not hear,
And if one counsel thee with kind'st intent,
Wilt reckon him a dark malignant foe.
But, calling Jove to witness for my soul,
I yet will speak. Know this, and mark it well.
Thou bear'st this sickness by a heavenly doom,
Since thou cam'st near the ward of Chrysa's isle,
The lurking snake, that guards the sky-roofed pen.

And from this plague thou ne'er shall find release
While the same Sun-god lifts him from the east
And droops to west again, till thou be come
Of thine own willing mind to Troya's plain,
Where our physicians, son of Phœbus' child,
Shall soothe thee from thy sore, and thou with me
And with this bow shalt take Troy's citadel
How do I know this ? I will tell thee straight.
We have a Trojan captive, Helenus,
The prince of prophets, who hath clearly told
This must be so ; yea, and ere harvest-time
This year, great Troy must fall ; else if this word
Be falsified, who will may slay the seer.
Now, since thou knowest this, accord thy will ;
For glorious is the gain, being singled forth
From all the Greeks as noblest, first to come
To healing hands, and then to win renown
Unrivalled, vanquishing all-tearful Troy.

Phil. O how I hate my life ! Why must it keep
This breathing form from sinking to the shades ?
How can I prove a rebel to his mind
Who thus exhorts me with affectionate heart ?
And yet, O misery ! must I give way ?
Then how could I endure the light of heaven ?
With whom could I exchange a word ? Ay me !
Eyes that have seen each act of my sad life,
How could ye bear it, to behold the sons
Of Atreus, who destroyed me, comrades now
And friends ! Læertes' wicked son, my friend !
And less I feel the grief of former wrong
Than shudder with expectance of fresh harm
They yet may wreak on me. For when the soul

Hath once been mother of an evil brood,
It nurseth nought but evils. Yea, at thee
I marvel. Thou should'st ne'er return to Troy,
Nor suffer me to go, when thou remember'st
The insult they have done thee, ravishing
Thy father's rights from thee. And wilt thou then
Sail to befriend them, pressing me in aid ?
Nay, do not, son ; but, even as thou hast sworn,
Convey me home, and thou, in Scyros dwelling,
Leave to their evil doom those evil men.
So thou shalt win a twofold gratitude
From me and from my father, and not seem,
Helping vile men, to be their parallel.

Ne. Thy warmth is natural. But yet I would,
Relying on my word and on Heaven's aid,
Thou would'st sail forth from Lemnos with thy friend.

Phil. Mean'st thou to Troy, and to the hateful son
Of Atreus, me, with this distressful limb ?

Ne. Nay, but to those that will relieve the pain
Of thy torn foot and heal thee of thy plague.

Phil. Thy words are horrible. What mean'st thou, boy ?

Ne. The act I see most noble for us both.

Phil. Wilt thou say so ? Where is thy fear of Heaven ?

Ne. Why should I fear, when I see certain gain ?

Phil. How ? Gain for the Atridæ, or for me ?

Ne. Methinks a friend should give thee friendly rede.

Phil. Friendly, to hand me over to my foes ?

Ne. Ah, be not hardened in thy misery !

Phil. I know thou wilt ruin me by what thou speak'st.

Ne. Not I. The case is dark to thee, I see.

Phil. I know the Atridæ cast me on this rock.

Ne. But how, if they should save thee afterwards ?

Phil. They ne'er shall make me see Troy with my will.

Ne. Hard is my fortune, then, if by no sleight
Of counsel I can draw thee to my mind.

For me 'twere easiest to end speech, that thou
Might'st live on as thou livest in hopeless pain.

Phil. Then leave me to my fate.—But thou hast
touched

My right hand with thine own, and given consent
To bear me to my home. Do this, dear son !
And do not linger to take thought of Troy.
Enough that name hath sounded in my groans.

Ne. If thou wilt, let us be going.

Phil. Nobly hast thou said the word.

Ne. Lean thy steps on mine.

Phil. As firmly as my foot will strength afford.

Ne. Ah ! but how shall I escape Achæan anger ?

Phil. Do not care.

Ne. Ah ! but if they spoil my country.

Phil. I to shield thee will be there.

Ne. How to shield me, how to aid me ?

Phil. With the shafts of Hercules

I will scare them.

Ne. Give thy blessing to this isle, and come in peace.

HERCULES appears from above.

Hercules. First, son of Pœas, wait till thou hast heard
The voice of Hercules, and felt his word.
Him thou behold'st, from the Etherial seat
Come down, for thee leaving the blest retreat,
To voice to thee the counsels of high Jove,
And check thee from the path where thou would'st rove.
Then hear me, first how after all my toils

By strange adventure I have found and won
Immortal glory, which thine eyes perceive.
And the like lot, I tell thee, shall be thine,
After these pains to rise to glorious fame.
Going with this thy comrade to Troy-town,
First thou shalt heal thee from thy grievous sore,
And then, being singled forth from all the host
As noblest, thou shalt conquer with that bow
Paris, prime author of these years of harm,
And capture Troy, and bear back to thine hall
The choicest guerdon, for thy valour's meed,
To Ceta's vale and thine own father's home.
But every prize thou tak'st be sure thou bear
Unto my pyre, in memory of my bow.
This word, Achilles' offspring, is for thee
No less. For, as thou could'st not without him,
So, without thee, he cannot take Troy's plain.
Then, like twin lions hunting in a leash,
Guard thou him, and he thee! and I will send
Asclepius Troyward to relieve thy pain.
For Ilion a second time must fall
Before the Herculean bow. But, take good heed,
Midst all your spoil to hold the gods in awe.
For our great Father counteth piety
Far above all. This follows men in death,
And faileth not when they resign their breath.

Phil. Welcome voice, long-looked-for head,

I will bend me to thy rede.

Ne. I, too, from my heart speak so.

Her. Linger not the time, but go.

Bright occasion and fair wind

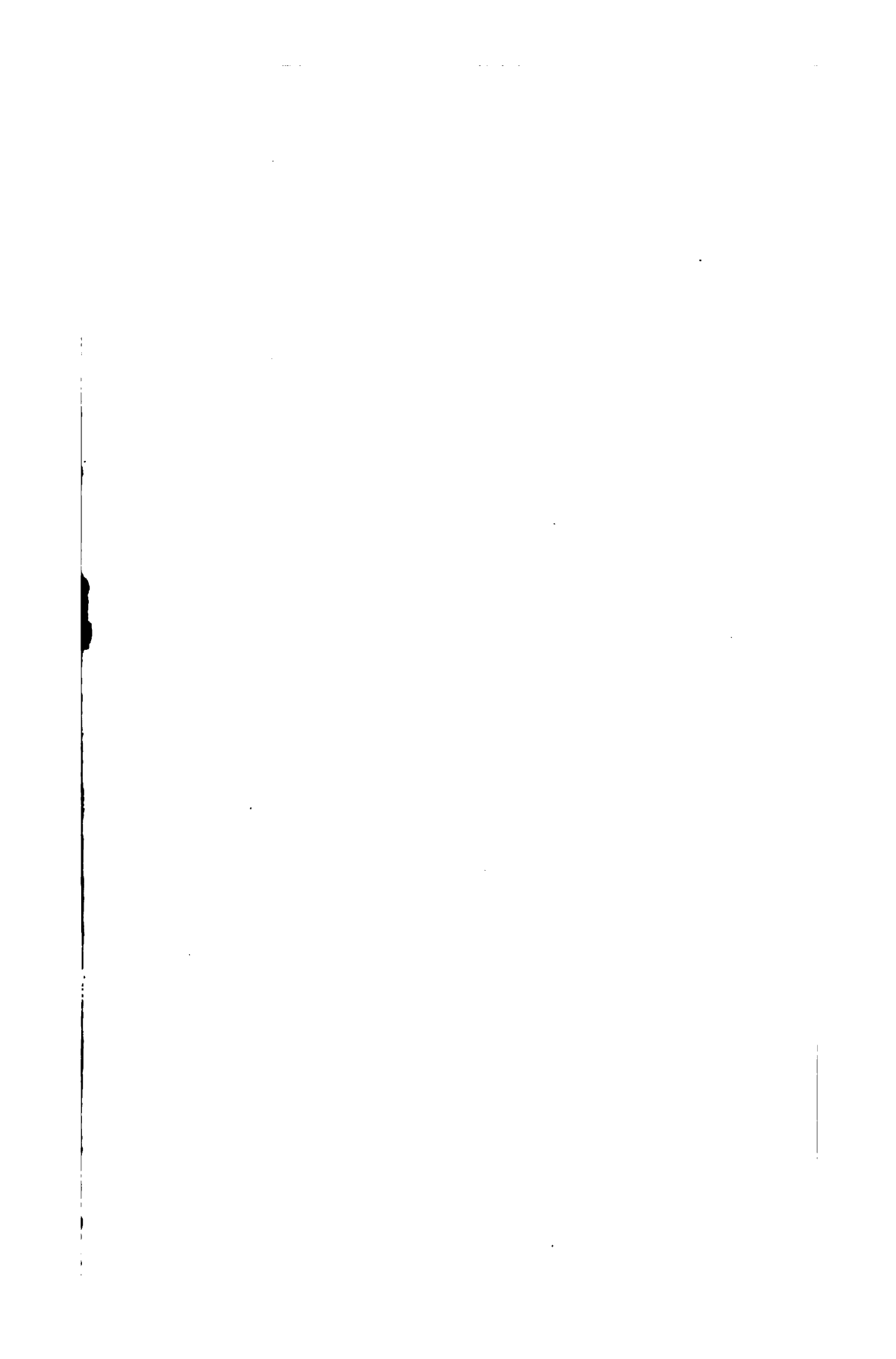
Urge your vessel from behind.

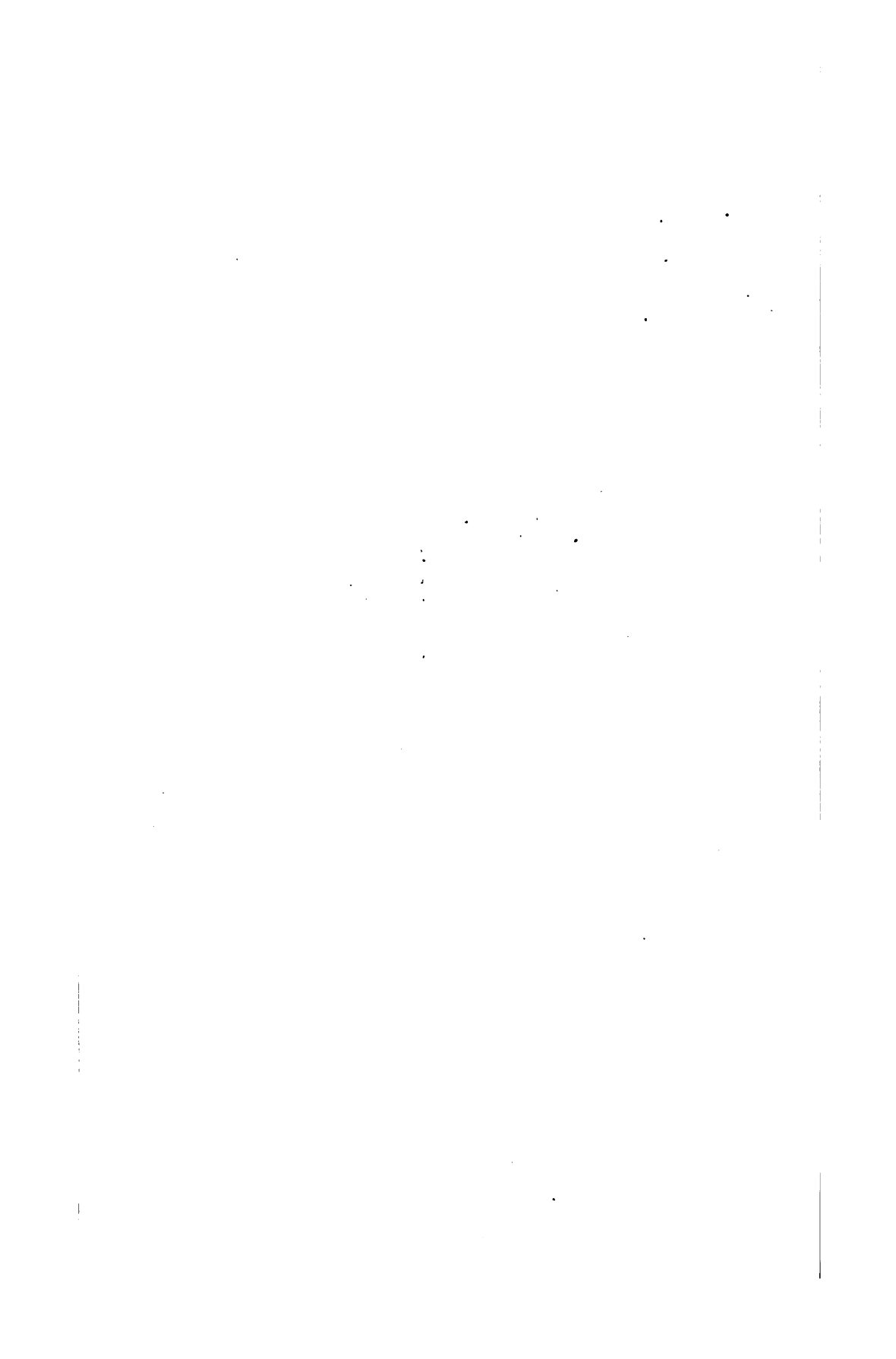
Phil. Come, let me bless the region as I go.

Poor house, sad comrade of my watch, farewell !
Ye nymphs of meadows where dark waters flow,
Thou ocean headland, peeling thy deep knell,
Where oft within my cavern as I lay
My hair was moist with dashing south-wind's spray,
And oftentimes came from Hermes' foreland high
Sad replication of my storm-vest cry ;
Ye fountains and thou Lycian water sweet,—
I never thought to leave you, yet my feet
Are turning from your paths, we part for aye.
Farewell ! and send me kindly on my way,
O Lemnian earth enclosed by circling seas,
To sail, where mighty Fate my course decrees,
And friendly voices point me, and the will
Of that heroic power, who doth this act fulfil.

Ch. Come now all in one close band ;
Then, ere loosing from the land,
Pray we to the nymphs of sea
Kind protectresses to be,
Till we touch the Trojan strand.

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